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THE
MONARCH OF MINCING-LANE.

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THE

MONARCH OF MINCING-LANE

A Novel.

BY

WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF 'KILMENY,' 'IN SILK ATTIRE,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18 CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

1871.

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Das war ein lustig Hochzeitfest ;
Zu Tafel sassen froh die Gäst'.
Und wie ich nach dem Brautpaar schaut'—
O weh ! mein Liebchen war die Braut.

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THE
MONARCH OF MINCING-LANE



CHAPTER I.

THE ROTUNDA DRAMA.

THERE was a young literary gentleman who lived in Sloane-street, and whose acquaintance Arthur Drem had been privileged to make. Philip's cousin, like a good many commercial men, was rather fond, in after-office hours, of the company of such professors of art, literature, and the drama as were disposed to smoke a cigar with him. They were not the most distinguished persons in their various walks whom Mr. Drem thus met; but, to a far greater extent than their more celebrated brethren, they had about them that aroma of Bohemianism

which, in the imagination of the pale circumspect young man, gave a sort of unholy zest to their society. After having spent the day among his decorous *confrères* in Mincing-lane, Arthur loved to stroll down to the chambers of his friend Mr. Samuel Hickes, and there hover, with a sort of pleased curiosity, on the verge of the realms of fancy and art.

Hickes lived by writing plays—chiefly dramas of a dark-complexioned hue—for a theatre on the southern side of the Thames. He was a quiet, inoffensive, dull young man, with fair hair, rather watery blue eyes, and no sort of will or conviction whatever. He was, perhaps, as ignorant a man as you could find in London ; and he had no opinions on any public or other subject, unless it were the flavour of bitter ale. He had as little strength of purpose in any direction ; and he would obey, in an unconscious fashion, any wish or whim that happened to strike his companion for the moment. He lived a harmless kind of life in those two little rooms he had rented in

the southern end of Sloane-street: smoking a pipe after breakfast, and planning out a farther development of his plot; writing a scene or two before dinner; then walking about in the afternoon; and finally turning in to a pothouse billiard-room in the neighbourhood to finish up the evening.

Yet this rather stupid and vacuous person had an astonishing faculty of being able to captivate the imagination of the people who frequented the transpontine theatre. The proprietor of the Rotunda, a worthy sort of man in his way, had been goaded by contemptuous critics into engaging, from time to time, various well-known playwrights to construct a better class of drama for him. These invariably failed. The plays were very clever; but the theatre was empty. No sooner, however, was a new piece of Hickes's put upon the stage, than pit, circle, and gallery were equally crammed. How was this? Here was a man who had neither literary culture nor anything like knowledge of human nature. He had not travelled, nor mixed

much with men ; he had gone through no great emotional crises himself ; and yet, by a mere trick of manipulation, and by the use of broad coarse colour, he could enchain the attention of the rude and ragged multitude of the Rotunda, and confer upon these dull brains the light of an intellectual gratification. He confessed himself that his means were wholly mechanical.

‘There,’ he would say to Arthur Drem, as they sat smoking, ‘you have the obstacle to the union of the lovers in an angry uncle, with the heroine rich, and the hero poor. In my next piece, I have only to make the hero rich, the heroine poor, and the obstacle an aunt, and you have another drama. I have eight standard characters. The square of eight is sixty-four ; and when I have written out these sixty-four combinations, I suppose I must begin and translate from the French—after I have learned French.’

He would talk in this way to one or two of his familiar acquaintances ; but he adopted another tone towards the world

at large, and especially towards theatrical managers. *Then* he became a profound analyst of the human emotions: he knew how to touch the public heart, and had seen a whole audience weeping over one of his pieces, with even the critics elevated into the *tears état*. He generally finished off lightly with this excellent joke, which he had probably borrowed from some burlesque.

Now Mr. Arthur took great interest in the successive combinations of these eight typical characters, or dramatic puppets, which his friend Hickes produced; and occasionally assisted with his criticism and suggestions such literary efforts. When he thought of a good plot or a striking situation, he would jot it down for Hickes's consideration; and he became familiar, too, with the requirements of the stage. The consequence was, that he sometimes got into a habit of regarding himself and the people around him as the possible actors in possible dramas—of a Rotunda type; and occasionally amused himself with speculat-

ing as to their probable action. How would the grave and discreet Mr. Ewart, for example, conduct himself, if suddenly plunged into a rollicking bigamy case? Mr. Arthur did not understand that his perceptions of things were being insensibly distorted by the influence of the Rotunda drama.

When, therefore, this complication between Philip and his father occurred, Arthur looked on the affair from a dramatic point of view, and wondered whether he could not play a part in it to his own advantage. It was precisely in such circumstances that the poor young men of the Rotunda stage became rich; and all Mr. Arthur's hopes of fortune were centred upon his uncle. Unfortunately, however, Mr. Drem had none of the grand characteristics of the Rotunda type of patron about him. He was neither to be flattered into doing a romantically-generous thing, nor cajoled into doing a foolishly-weak thing. He was remarkably wide awake. Arthur would not have bet upon his being able to get a five-pound note out of his

uncle. Indeed, it was not to be concealed that the nephew looked upon his relative as somewhat of a sneak, because he happened not to be a simpleton.

Nevertheless the position of affairs began to look more auspicious as Mr. Drem's ill-temper drove him into direct antagonism with his son; and Arthur was fairly startled when his uncle declared, in a gust of passion, that he would give a thousand pounds to any one who would marry Lilian Seaford. Here, surely, was a sufficiently dramatic turn that circumstances had taken; for if Mr. Drem would give money to have such a service done him, he would not stop at one thousand as the reward. Arthur Drem, however, despite his Rotunda proclivities, was too cool-headed not to know that his uncle only spoke in the violence of his temper, and that if he, Arthur, were to succeed in marrying Lilian Seaford, and then go to his uncle to receive the reward, the latter would either burst out laughing in his face or kick him downstairs.

Long before any one in the office sus-

pected what had taken place, Arthur learned of the distinct and apparently final rupture which had occurred between father and son; here was another aspect which the case had assumed, also dramatic, and full of possibilities. Mr. Arthur's imagination got possession of the reins of his reason. His cousin Philip once away, who should be Mr. Drem's heir but himself, Arthur? Was it not for his interest that this breach should never be healed?

But no one knew better than Arthur his uncle's invincible and gratuitous spite. He knew that Richard Drem, were he to fancy that any one was waiting and hungering for his money, would take a malicious joy in disappointing him, and would grin in his grave (the possibility being granted) over his relative's rage. Arthur was not sure of becoming his uncle's heir.

On the other hand, he could see that there was nothing in the world which the rich merchant so much desired as a reconciliation with his son, and the abandonment, on the part of the latter, of his mar-

riage. If he could secure both, would not his uncle be glad to reward him by leaving him the whole of the great business of Drem and Co.? And as his small and avaricious mind—which was singularly like his uncle's in many respects—leapt forward to this practical and happy climax, he sighed to think that the course of events leading up to it could not be compressed into Rotunda time, in which a man's life and career were represented in two hours.

Full of these speculations, he hastened down in the evening to Hickes's rooms in Sloane-street. In such circumstances, who should be better able to advise him? Hickes was quite familiar with these awkward complications; he was a professor of the art of arranging them. And there must have been a certain amount of art in Samuel Hickes's manipulation; for, while not believing himself in his stage theories of life, he had almost persuaded the clear-headed Arthur Drem into believing them.

Mr. Hickes was in the billiard-room over the way, and his landlady sent her

little girl for him. Meanwhile Arthur Drem sat down in an easy-chair, and rapidly ran over the possibilities of his position. In these few minutes he conceived the bold project of not only turning them into a drama, but of getting this maker of dramas to play a part in it. To make the master of puppets himself a puppet was a notable scheme, and Arthur began to consider himself a man of genius.

‘At all events, I shall be a rich man,’ he said, rising and pacing up and down the room. ‘If only I can pull all this through, I shall be my own master, and bid farewell to Mincing-lane. Men have grown rich upon worse schemes; for, after all, am I not working for the good both of my uncle and of his son?’

The dramatist, when he arrived, was found to be rather sulky and out of spirits; for he had lost at pool, and some flat ale had given him a headache. However, he brightened up a little over a cup of tea, and proposed that Arthur should accompany him to the Rotunda, it being the

benefit-night of the manager, in compliment to whom he had taken a box and paid for it.

‘I’d just as soon be here,’ said Arthur, who was comfortably ensconced in an easy-chair.

‘Perhaps it would be more jolly to stay in-doors,’ said Hickes; and he began to look about for his slippers.

‘Yet it is a pity you should have your box for nothing. Suppose we walk over and stay for a short time?’

‘Very well, that will be better,’ said Hickes, who was at all times only too glad to have the trouble of decision taken from him. ‘The manager will be pleased, you know.’

So the two walked down Sloane-street, and through Pimlico, and over Vauxhall-bridge, and in course of time found themselves in front of the Rotunda. It was a large gaunt white building, standing at the corner of two thoroughfares, in a not very respectable locality. The front of it, gaily illuminated with gas, was decorated with

gigantic pictures of the moving incidents to be beheld within : the rescue of a maiden from a rushing cataract—the stabbing of a nobleman by a person with a mask and dark lantern—the breaking of a bridge over a ravine, and the appearance of a human body, head downward, in the air.

‘Nearly all these are my puppets, in different situations,’ remarked Hickes, with a lethargic smile, to his companion. ‘But the people never see that they are always the same, however much the situation and their costume may differ.’

‘You like to depreciate your own work,’ returned Arthur with a laugh, ‘like other artists. But you wouldn’t care to have your criticisms taken *au sérieux*, would you?’

And, indeed, he would not: he was far more vain of his literary performances than he affected to be. There was in him also, as may hereafter appear, a vague sort of wish to do right and be thought well of—a sort of sediment of self-respect, which was sometimes being curiously stirred up in a

feeble way. Even his indecision of purpose arose from a kind of wish to please the people around him; he could not take the trouble to have a will of his own and be disagreeable.

They went up into the theatre, and into the box which had been reserved for them. A frightful din was going on between the acts. The large building, reeking with the smell of escaped gas, oranges, and gin, was crowded with a dense multitude of dusky figures, chiefly those of boys and girls; and these were shouting to each other, and laughing, and handing from mouth to mouth some dingy green bottle, filled with a colourless liquor. Twenty per cent of the thieves of south London were in the crowded gallery; while in the tawdry and dirty boxes were tawdry and not very clean-faced girls, with flaunting finery on their heads and coarse paint on their cheeks. In the 'dress-circle' were a good many shop-boys and young men out with their sweethearts; while in the pit were a few working-men and their wives. The majority of Mr. Hickes's audi-

ence were not a cultivated or intellectual race: but then they were human beings. They had all got beyond the tail period: it is probable there was not one present who could have swung by his feet from a tree.

Mr. Arthur and his friend were in time to see the last act of a favourite Rotunda piece; and a very exciting act it was. The diverse threads of the story had all to be brought together and tied in a knot, so that the dramatist might cut it at one bold and final stroke. All sorts of villainous persons had to be brought to an untimely death, in order that the virtuous people might find the stage cleared for them. Hard and sharp came the avenging raps of Destiny, until one could almost have begun to sympathise with evil on account of the harsh treatment it was receiving.

The next piece was a still more stirring drama which Mr. Hickes had written at an early period of his career. Few of his subsequent efforts were more popular than this *Black Chieftain of Lochgoil, or the Vengeance of Binnorie*; and, indeed, there was

a good deal of rough vigour about the construction of the drama and the interest of the story. Hickes complained, naturally enough, that the appointments of the theatre —the weak-kneed clansmen, the ranting hero, and the chieftain's daughter, whose accent had a twang of Camberwell-green about it—would have burlesqued a better piece; and even the much-believing audience were inclined to be satirical about the kilts and tinfoil shield of the Black Chieftain himself. Mr. Arthur, however, paid but little attention to the drama. He was aware that the chieftain's daughter kept tossing about her *h's* as a juggler does his glass balls, and that her father had an indescribably ludicrous manner of scowling and talking in a hoarse whisper. But his thoughts were with another drama, and he was wondering what part he should have to play himself. He had not yet had an opportunity of mentioning the matter to Mr. Hickes.

At length (after having gone behind the scenes and drunk some sour half-and-

half in a celebrated tragedian's dressing-room) they returned to Hickes's lodgings; and, having dispatched some brief sort of supper, they settled down to their smoke and their talk. Mr. Arthur proceeded to tell his friend as much of what had occurred, with reference to his uncle and cousin, as Hickes did not already know; and then he said,

'I came naturally to you to ask for advice. It seems to me that here is just one of those things out of which one might make something; and you ought to know how. You have studied all these domestic complications, and you know what men are likely to do in them.'

But Mr. Hickes had no such belief in the creations of his fancy as Mr. Drem had.

'I know what men on the stage would do,' said he, with a vague smile. 'I would not advise you to attempt any theatrical *coup* in private life.'

'But why?' said Arthur. 'It does not look improbable on the stage; why should it be in real life? And, after all, a deal

of nonsense is talked about improbability, merely because some people fancy certain things unlikely to occur to them. A man in a quiet way of living—who does not mix much with various men, and who has, perhaps, not very much money, and not very much passion—finds strong passions, and daring acts, and hazardous resolutions in a drama or in a book, and then he cries out, “O, improbable!” Take your own case. It seems improbable to you that Mr. Drem would give you an annuity of 200*l.* a year for marrying this girl I have been speaking about. That is only because you are not rich enough to understand that 200*l.* a year may be a trifle to a man like him, determined to have his own way. In higher spheres of life than yours or mine there are greater opportunities for romance, and I think they become greater the higher you go. Men who have been accustomed to study their lightest whim—who have had unlimited command of money—whose temper has become headstrong by constant indulgence — are they not likely to do

things improbable to either me or you, who are merely mice in a wire-wheel, going our small round, and never moving beyond ?”

Mr. Arthur delivered himself of this argument with emphasis, for he had been studying it the whole evening.

‘By Jove, there is something in that,’ said Hickes, whose powers of reasoning were very small, and who had a leaning towards agreeing with anybody.

‘Fancy what Mr. Ewart would call probable,’ cried Arthur: ‘a man who goes on like clockwork from year’s end to year’s end, never varying by five minutes his hour for luncheon. Anything sudden, or passionate, or dramatic would look impossible to him. So with you. Don’t imagine a thing improbable merely because you would not do it yourself.’

‘I understand you—I understand you,’ said Hickes. ‘Perhaps my combinations of puppets are more possible than I ever fancied them.’

‘We may leave them out of the question just now,’ said Arthur, ‘with the as-

surance that you will never make your fortune by them. You may go on working to the end of the chapter, and never earn anything beyond a precarious income. And then, when you are old, what's to become of you?"

'True enough,' said Hickes thoughtfully, coinciding at once with every suggestion of his companion. Indeed, his mind was continually being blown about in this way; and he seemed rather to prefer that some one else should accept the task of thinking for him.

'Now, Hickes,' said Mr. Arthur seriously, 'I have been considering all this afternoon whether you and I mightn't find something profitable in this business; and I begin to believe we might. One way I will tell you. If you were to marry this Miss Seaford, and so prevent my cousin's marrying her, I believe my uncle would give you a couple of thousand pounds.'

'But suppose he didn't—it would be rather awkward, wouldn't it?' he said with a smile.

Indeed, Mr. Hickes had no belief at all in Mr. Arthur's proposed transference of stage-business to real life.

‘Or get her into a position that you could go and say to my uncle, “Give me 2000*l.*, and I will marry her.” I am certain he would give you the money.’

‘Perhaps he might. And how to get the girl to marry me—or to promise to marry me?’

‘Good heavens! You ask that of me!’ exclaimed Arthur. ‘*You* ought to know—that is why I came to you.’

‘O, I know how it could be done on the stage,’ replied Hickes carelessly. ‘Nothing simpler. You get a dying mother to lay her commands on her—’

‘Her mother is dead already,’ said Arthur.

‘Or you ruin her, and make her glad to marry you.’

‘Why not?’ said Arthur.

‘Or you threaten to kill her unless she swears an oath that she will marry you. But all that is mere bosh, you know. It

couldn't happen in real life. If you tried it on, somebody would punch your head, or the girl would laugh in your face.'

'Don't be so sure,' said Arthur. 'If these things hadn't happened some time, they would not be in dramas; and, having happened sometimes, they might happen again. I'll tell you what it is, Hickes: if you had the courage to pull yourself together, and act a little bit of one of your own dramas—just as you would write it down—you might do a rare good turn for both yourself and me.'

'I think you're stage-struck,' said Hickes with a dull laugh, but showing a little more curiosity and attention all the same.

'I know more of life than you do,' retorted Arthur coolly; 'and I know that stagey things are quite practicable, if they are done boldly. It is only your pet canary, that has been brought up in a cage, that disbelieves in the picture of the eagle striking the lamb. You think life is not full of violent changes and accidents merely because you live in Sloane-street and have

the same sort of bread-and-butter for breakfast every day.'

'Well, I give in on that point,' said Hickes (was there any point on which he would not have given in?). 'Suppose I admit that there are more chances of dramatic business among rich people than among us humdrum middle-class people—what then? Do you propose that I am to turn into one of my own villains, and strike at the lamb, as you poetically put it? Upon my soul, it is the richest notion I have heard for many a day! There is something sublime about it.'

And he lay back in his chair and laughed; it was seldom his sense of humour was so touched.

'And if you, who have made so many villains, cannot yourself play the part of villain, who should?' said Arthur, also laughing.

'But then,' said Hickes—making a true remark by chance—'it is the very essence of the stage-villain to show his villainy, and inform everybody how bad he is. In real

life, he would be kicked out of the house at once.'

'My dear fellow,' said Arthur, 'it is getting near midnight; and I am a commercial man, who must be at business in the morning. Let us stop this joking, and talk over the matter seriously. I don't want you to play the part of villain, or do any harm to any one. On the contrary, by getting this girl to marry you, you would do everybody a vast deal of good. If my cousin marries her, he will be a poor man all his life; she will be wretched in thinking she has made him poor; his father will be a miserable man all his days. On the other hand, you step in: you get yourself a pretty wife and a considerable addition to your income; you will make her a good husband; you will restore Philip to his proper position; and you will gladden his father's heart.'

'But what am I to do for you, since I am conferring favours on everybody?'

'Leave that to me,' said Arthur. 'Now do you see that all this is to be done by

your accomplishing one thing—your marriage with an inexperienced young girl? If you cannot do that, what is the value of all your dramas?’

‘I never said they had any—in *that* direction,’ replied Hickes. ‘Really, Drem, you seem quite serious about it.’

‘I *am* serious.’

‘But it is absurd.’

‘Why?’

‘Why! Why, how should I make her consent to marry me, when she is already engaged to another man?’

‘Did you never hear of engagements being broken off? I tell you, that with one bold stroke out of your dramatic experience, you ought to settle the thing at once.’

‘I could not even become acquainted with her—how is it possible?’

‘I say again, that you should not ask me. You ought to be familiar with every detail. A man in your position should be capable of acting in any emergency.’

‘Nonsense! You *will* confuse this stage stuff with real life.’

‘I tell you nine-tenths of people do not know the difference; and, if you boldly brought the stage stuff to bear upon them, would accept it in perfect good faith. You ask how to become acquainted with her? There are a dozen ways. She teaches in a Sunday-school; why not go and become a teacher yourself, and touch her sympathy that way, and make the acquaintance of the whole family?’

‘I become a Sunday-school teacher! I should not be able to tell the first from the fifth commandment, nor the ninth from the tenth.’

‘That is because you did not observe a regular series in breaking them,’ observed Arthur gracefully.

‘And if she were to consent to marry me because I became a Sunday-school teacher, she must be supplied with a good many possible husbands already.’

‘Of course; I only meant that to be the first step,’ said Arthur testily. ‘If I am to describe everything you have to do, I might as well do it.’

‘What is the use of keeping a dog and barking yourself, you would say? Well, why not marry her yourself?’

For it was plain that Mr. Hickes still remained in the outer regions of scepticism. The pendulum of his mind swung towards faith in the representations of his friend, but inevitably swung back again into infidelity. He had a terribly definite consciousness of the mechanical nature of that stage business by which he made his living. Far more intimately than Arthur, he knew how artificial it was in construction. Had Mr. Hickes been acquainted with some faint rudiments of philosophy, he might have argued that all the emotional and other complications of the Rotunda drama were nevertheless only combinations of what must have been actual human experience at some time or other; but he knew only the remarkably matter-of-fact method in which he, as a handcraftsman, whipped up the old materials into new forms. It was not the case of a shoemaker disbelieving in leather; but that of a shoemaker refusing to believe

that a skin of leather could be mistaken for a living ox.

Samuel Hickes, however, was a weak man, easily persuaded. Despite his own puzzled doubts as to the feasibility of the project mentioned by Arthur Drem, he had nearly been won over to trying it by his adviser and friend. Even Arthur Drem was interested in watching the curious spectacle of the vacillation of this man's belief. At one minute he would start back from the proposal with scorn and derision, laughing at himself for having entertained it for an instant. To attempt to carry out a tragedy-plot in real life—it was too absurd! And then again, yielding to the influence of Mr. Arthur's persuasion, he would incline the other way, and would admit that, after all, this melodramatic climax might be reached by a succession of possible and natural steps.

‘There you have hit upon a great truth!’ exclaimed Arthur, who, following the example of more celebrated and wiser men, was fain to term a great truth that which

accorded with his own beliefs. ‘People call certain situations in plays or books melodramatic and impossible because they do not see the small stages by which these points are reached. The drama or the story omits all the dull or tentative passages in a man’s life, and gives you the sharp and striking incidents; and then the critic cries out that these things are too sharp and striking. Would he like to spend three weeks in a Japanese theatre, to see the events of a drama brought about naturally and without crises?’

Mr. Arthur was pleased to find himself talking so fluently, and began to think the society of literary persons improving. As for Hickes, his intellect was too wavering and ‘woolly’ to follow out any piece of clear reasoning, or accept its conclusions; but he was impressed by it all the same. The engine of an argument rushed past his bewildered head, and he could not tell whither it had gone; but the force of the wind which it caused made him stagger backward. He was not very sure that

Arthur Drem had demonstrated all these things. Perhaps he had; perhaps he could prove himself to be right. All that Samuel Hickes knew was, that a very curious and difficult matter had been set before him; and that he felt half-inclined to study it more closely, merely out of curiosity.

CHAPTER II.

BY THE SEA.

‘THIS is a very pleasant hotel,’ said Mr. Philip, as he stood at the window one morning before breakfast, and looked out over the spacious bay. ‘And really the attention of the domestics is surprising. Fancy their having these fresh wild-flowers brought in for our breakfast-table every morning!’

With that he caught sight of a grim smile on Jim’s face; and then, turning to Lilian, remarked that there was a glow of colour in her cheeks, and a light in her eyes, as if she had already been out in the cool breeze and the early sunshine.

‘My dear child,’ he said, ‘you don’t mean to say that you have been out every morning before breakfast to gather these flowers? When *do* you get up?’

‘Ye may well ask her!’ said Jims. ‘I think the young witch has been flying about all night on a broomstick; for the earlier I get up, the earlier I find her coming back over the hill up there, wi’ her hands fu’ o’ flowers, and singing like a lintie, wi’ nae ane to hear her. And this mornin’, I’m sure, there wasna a bird awake when she came to my door, and bade me come out wi’ her. And here was I, a poor auld man, dragged away by this will-o’-the-wisp down thae fearsome rocks, and round bits o’ shore and up over the hills, wi’ her laughin’ and rinnin’ and caperin’ like a mad thing. ’Deed, it’s time, miss, ye sat demure and respectable on the sofa there, lookin’ as if ye’d ne’er been out the house !’

‘And I have been supposing these flowers were brought by the servants !’ said Philip.

‘I thought you might like to have some every morning,’ said she timidly, and not looking up.

It was only one of the many little ways in which she strove to please him, in her innocent tender fashion. She had some-

how or other got it into her head that he was her guest. Here, down in Devonshire, she was at home. She knew every lane and bay, every quiet nook and old ruin, and all the secret haunts of the wild-flowers ; and she took her two companions about with a sort of anxious care that they should be amused and gratified, and was filled with a proud satisfaction when she saw them pleased. The tender little show-woman forgot all about herself. How was her comfort or convenience to be considered, when she had two guests to entertain ? And so she was out in the early morning—away over the cliffs and down in the wooded coves by the sea—to gather some sweet-scented and sweet-coloured wild-flowers for the breakfast-table of her lord.

It may be remembered that Mr. Philip had been permitted to accompany Jims and Lilian on their business-excursion as a sort of *attaché*. It was soon very clear, however, that Mr. Philip was taking the management of the whole affair. On arriving at the small town, Jims proposed that Lilian

and he should go to some smaller hostelry than that Philip was likely to go to, so that Lilian's friends might see her there. But Mr. Philip said No; they should all go to the same hotel, where they might have a private sitting-room for the reception of visitors. Accordingly he carried them off to the big building which, a little way outside the town, stands on a platform of rock above the sea, fronting the rippling waters of Tor Bay, the long neck of land on the other side, and then the far horizon, where the sky and water meet.

How could they tire of the perpetual change of picture visible from the large windows, or the warm terraces, or the exposed promontories of rock? Was there any hour in the day in which the land and the sky and the sea preserved the same aspect? On the evening of their arrival, a misty yellow sunlight lay over the bay, and the opposite coast seemed far and dream-like in the haze. But next morning the land opposite had come strangely and sharply near, so that you could see every

house and field and hedge ; a brisk breeze from the south-west was bringing up heavy swift masses of cloud over the sky, and these threw splatches of shadow on the great tumbling breadth of green waves that ran, white-crested, in for the shore. The boats rolled in the harbour, with creaking cordage ; and the wind that blew through the small town was laden with the smell of sea-weed. Towards mid-day the wind moderated, and the sun was faintly hidden by a fleece of gray cloud ; the opposite shore receded, and the long line stretching out to Berry Head lay like a dusky bar of blue in the blinding gray light of the sea and sky. And then again, towards the afternoon, the clouds thickened and grew thunderous ; and suddenly—when one had forgotten all about sunset, and expected a gray and listless evening—there appeared a lurid glow of dusky brown in the west ; the masses of cloud over Paignton shore became illuminated as if with fire ; and their lower edges, with the sunlight shining on the other side, came down in a red smoke of rain. Behind

these ragged streaks of crimson, again, there were glimpses of the far green and gold of the sunset; and this keener and clearer colour, as the thunder-clouds slowly lifted, sent a pallid glow over the waters of the bay and the full tide of the harbour. Finally, above the clouds, there rose the clear stillness of the twilight, that glimmered on the fronts of the houses high up on the wooded hills; and overhead, in the pale-green sky, yellow stars began to burn.

They explored all the neighbourhood too, and had small picnics down in secret clefts of the coast, where the sea had eaten out a semicircle in the red sandstone or the gray rock, and washed up a shelf of clear white shingle. They drove down the narrow leafy lanes, with the tall banks and the wilderness of foliage about. Mr. Philip hired a yacht furthermore; and they went cruising round the land, looking up at the precipitous cliffs, with their great caverns or bold arches jutting into the water, or looking far out on the blue plain of the sea, with the sails of distant ships, or a faint

string of wild-duck, sinking down into the horizon. It was a happy time; and Mr. Philip was glad to perceive that so busy and anxious was Lilian in making everything pleasant, she had nearly forgotten why she so wished the time to be happy.

One morning he missed his wild-flowers, and Lilian was a few minutes late for breakfast. She came in almost breathless, her face suffused with colour.

‘Where have you been?’ said he.

‘After some daft trick, I warrant,’ said Jims.

‘I have been to Paignton,’ she said with a smile of triumph in her eyes.

‘To Paignton!’ exclaimed Philip: ‘it is three miles off!’

‘Well,’ she said with an anxious apology, ‘I thought it was a pity to take you there, and break up the day for me, when I knew you wanted to go to Watcombe. So I thought I’d start off and see Mrs. Ros-siter by myself.’

‘And you have walked there and back before breakfast!’ said Jims rather angrily.

'No,' she said with a laugh; 'I ran nearly all the way back, for I thought I should be late.'

What was Mr. Philip to say when he saw the great unselfishness and affection that were shining in her eyes? He had not the heart to scold her. He was going to do it; but something at the back of his throat prevented him.

In the evenings they had plenty of company; for among the first persons whom Mr. Philip met at the hotel was the M.P. for a northern Radical borough whom he knew very well, and who had, without asking leave of his constituents, run down to Torquay for a fortnight with his three daughters. This Mr. Stanberry was himself a sort of 'philosophical Radical,' with very definite convictions; and nothing pleased him better than to get into a fierce controversy with old James Lawson and with Philip in the smoking-room, while Lilian was in the drawing-room submitting timidly to be petted by the three girls.

It was the first time she had ever met

three such young persons, who had run the gauntlet of several London seasons, and acquired an excellent coolness of manner. Catch a timid little wren, and put it in a cage with three calm and well-bred canaries, and watch how they will regard its frightened wide-eyed wonder. The three girls were amused by this young creature, who was so fascinatingly pretty; who dressed, and talked, and walked, and sewed as they did, yet who had an indescribable something about her which made her *pi-quante*, unfamiliar, and captivating. They did not meet her with the cool criticism and with the somewhat distant courtesy they would have assumed to an ordinary stranger. They began to pet her, as they would have simultaneously rushed to kiss a pretty child, or tease a kitten. They were consequently very frank with her, and revealed their various dispositions in the most open fashion.

There was Catherine, the eldest, who was rather good-looking, and conscious of it—who was graceful and dignified, yield-

ing to her two sisters with a condescension and a swiftness for which she gave herself ample credit.

Mary, the second, was the fat one, who was rather selfish—especially at meals—and a trifle irritable and ill-tempered. She was the plainest of the three—had flaxen hair and tepid blue eyes, while the others had darker hair and dark eyelashes over their gray eyes—and was quite frankly jealous and angry when she saw her two sisters monopolising the attention of gentlemen whom they might meet when out riding or walking.

There was Lucy, the youngest, quick, pretty, sharp in her look and speech, and a notorious and wicked flirt. She had a habit of modestly keeping in the background when her two sisters were present; but that was only her cunning. Ten to one you found her flirting desperately in a corner with some grave gentleman whom she had inveigled thither; or engaged in the same occupation with another gentleman, as she lagged behind her sisters'

horses, and conversed in a series of pert whispers with her companion on foot. Catherine patronised Lilian in a kindly way; Mary had a sort of sleepy liking for her; but this Lucy put her arm round her neck, as she sat on a chair, and talked nonsense into her ear. She was a dangerous young person, this Lucy; as more than one young gentleman can testify.

‘What a pretty ring that is!’ she said one evening, as she somehow had got Lilian’s hand in hers.

‘That is my engaged ring,’ said Lilian with a conscious blush of pride.

‘I thought so,’ said the other, still holding the small white fingers. ‘Do you know what serious things engagements are? They very often lead to marriage.’

Lilian did not quite understand the coolness of this remark; but Miss Lucy went on:

‘How odd it is we should never have met at Mr. Drem’s house! I have only been once or twice, to be sure; but my sisters have been frequently.’

‘I never was in the house,’ said Lilian. ‘My father was a half-cousin of Mr. Drem, and they were never very good friends.’

‘O, indeed,’ said the other, opening her eyes very wide.

She guessed in a moment that there was something very peculiar in this complication, but she had too much delicacy to show her curiosity. There had been a good deal of confidence, however, between the two girls during these few days; and so Lilian said to her simply,

‘I like to look at this ring, and know I am engaged. But I do not think we shall ever be married.’

‘Why not? I think you like him very well; and anybody can see how desperately fond he is of you. It is quite pleasant to see the anxious way in which he tries to make everything nice for you. But what amuses one most of all is his chivalrous way of proving you to be the wisest little woman in the world. When we are all chatting together, you never say anything, or express any preference, without his in-

stantly taking it up, and showing how right you are, and giving some profound reason for it. The first evening I met you, I thought you must be some authoress travelling in a pretty disguise—Minerva going about as Venus, you know—until I found out that you were—that you were, indeed, rather stupid, just like the rest of us.'

Miss Stanberry had a sufficiently good and accurate opinion of her own cleverness to know that she was paying a compliment in saying so.

'We women are poor creatures,' she said with a sigh. 'Whatever originality of character we start with doesn't matter; for destiny compels us to become stupid at last, and fall in love with men. Nature is too much for us.'

'And have you fallen in love yet?' said Lilian timidly, yet with an eager curiosity.

'O, yes; ever so often,' replied the other gaily. 'Turn over my music-books, and see. If gentlemen had any sense, when they go flirting and pretending to make love (and expecting to find that you have never spoken

to a man before), they would examine these painful records of bygone *affaires*. I think music-books are awkward things for us girls; for, you see, every man who comes about one must inscribe his name—in large and sprawling letters generally—over the title-pages of the songs and pieces he sends you, just as if he were doing something bold and original. And then some one takes up the book; and there is your music-master's name, with whom you flirted when you were still in short petticoats; and there is this cousin's name, and that cousin's name; and then follow the names of other gentlemen, who have had their brief hour of bliss, and departed. Then, supposing you were to have a real *bonâ-fide* lover, and supposing he were to get into a temper, he'd be sure to provoke you by referring to these names, and asking you about them. When I have a real lover, I think I shall burn my music; I cannot have him turning over the pages to prove previous convictions.'

‘What have you done with my *eau de*

Cologne, Lucy?' said Mary sharply, coming into the room. 'I told you to get *eau de Cologne* for yourself before you came down here.'

'You may have my bottle,' remarked imperial Catherine with calm sweetness, looking up from her book.

'I don't want yours,' retorted Mary, going off hot and sulky to her chamber.

In this beautiful scenery, in this pleasant company, Mr. Philip almost forgot that in a few days' time he might have to become cabman, or clerk, or tide-waiter. He even forgot that 60*l.* was not a large sum with which to live for a fortnight *en prince* at a fashionable watering-place. That manner of living was so natural to him, that he found no difficulty whatever in being careless about half-sovereigns. It was the knowledge of their value that he had yet to learn; and he staved off the evil day.

In the mean time Lilian and Jims had seen all the people whom they wished to see; and the rest of their stay in the south was to be given up to pure idleness and

pleasure. Ten days had passed ; there were fewer than ten to come ; and all that Lilian could wish for, in the thankfulness of her heart, was that the remainder of the time might be as sweet and beautiful as that which had passed.

‘In London,’ she said to Jims, as they sat together on the rocks over the gleaming sea, ‘we shall be able to dream of this place. It may be years and years before we see it again.’

‘You may see it again,’ said the old man ; ‘I never shall. Or, wha kens, but that in the next world we may have wonderful powers o’ vision, and may be able to look frae the blue up there to the blue doon here. And if that were the case, d’ye think aye could get a bonnier place to look at than this blue bay, wi’ the green hills round it and the jagged gray rocks out there ?’

The jagged gray rocks presented no problems to Jims. They were not half so firmly imbedded as was his faith. The next world, which his imagination had pie-

tured to him, was a firmer reality to him than this one; and he would have regarded only as dreams the demonstrations of the geologists that these planetary bodies must in time be dashed into the sun. It was for a poet, not for this practical and determined old weaver, to conjecture as to the possible inhabitants of that splendid orb, when, like our present globe, it may have cooled sufficiently to produce living forms; and to wonder whether Nature has only one system of evolution, or whether, under these new and magnificent conditions, the line of life will reach a climax as superior to man as he is to the first reptile that crawled. Jims would have scornfully asked you to point out anything of that kind in the first chapters of Genesis.

Now there were to be some steeple-chases in the neighbourhood, and as they all decided to go, Mr. Philip must needs drive thither four-in-hand. Mr. Stanberry and his daughters were invited to be of the party; and so it was that Lilian found herself seated next to the driver of the hand-

some drag as it started from the hotel-door —Jims looking anxiously ahead for sharp corners and obstructions; Mr. Stanberry taking the matter more coolly, for he had constantly seen Mr. Philip driving in the Park.

‘You have a valuable freight, Mr. Drem,’ remarked the youngest Miss Stanberry, as they rolled along.

‘Don’t you be afraid, Miss Lucy,’ said he. ‘I have driven four-in-hand all over the south of Russia.’

‘But there it didn’t matter how many people you killed,’ she remarked, ‘as you were only doing service to your native country.’

‘At critical moments you mustn’t talk to the man at the wheel,’ said he, as his off leader showed symptoms of shying at a newspaper which lay open on the road, and which the wind was blowing about.

Nothing of any consequence occurred until they reached the course. A sum of twenty shillings was demanded for the admission of a four-wheeled carriage into the

enclosure ; and Mr. Philip tossed down the sovereign to the man as if the events of the past fortnight and his present position were alike forgotten. The drag was driven up by the side of the ropes, the horses taken out, and the people on the top of the carriage turned to look at their surroundings.

They were on the side of a large circular hollow in the neighbourhood of St. Mary Church, and round the pretty wooded valley they could trace the line of the course, marked by small yellow flags. A short distance in front of them stood the grand-stand—a huge bare wooden erection about half filled with people. Down before it, the crowd that moved about, and stared at the Punch-and-Judy shows, or listened to the nigger songs, or watched juggling feats, was denser than elsewhere ; and indeed one was puzzled to discover how the neighbourhood of Torquay could have turned out such an assemblage. The scene, in short, reminded one of a Derby-day in miniature ; only that the men and women

who walked about in their stiff Sunday costumes had brown faces, thick-set frames, and a stupid look. There was none of the smartness and the gaudy finery that distinguish the holiday of the pale-faced London clerk and his sweetheart. A good deal of beer was being drunk in the refreshment-tents by burly farm-servants and stout tradesmen from the neighbouring villages; but you did not see some pallid boy of fifteen, with a flashy tie, sham jewelry, and a big cigar, produce a bottle of champagne for the delectation of his mistress—a coarse woman of thirty with green ribbons, and paint on her face.

‘You have never told me, Philip,’ said Lilian, ‘what you have been doing these last two or three days, when you disappeared in the afternoon, and no one could tell where you had gone.’

‘You must not be curious.—Must she, Miss Stanberry?’

‘I think she has a right to be,’ observed the eldest Miss Stanberry with a graceful smile, as she glanced at Lilian’s gloved

hand, where the circle of the ring was visible through the glove.

Philip caught the direction of her eyes, and laughed. He had no time for explanation, however, as there devolved upon him the duty of getting up a sweepstake for the first race. It was an open handicap for seventy sovereigns, added to a sweepstake of ten sovs. each; and there were seven horses down on the card.

‘That is one for each of us,’ said Philip. ‘But I forgot.—Perhaps you won’t go in, Mr. Lawson?’ he added.

Jims gave him distinctly to understand that he would join in no such games of chance, that had a smack of the devil about them. So Philip took two horses; and when they had paid up their half-crowns, and picked their cards out of Philip’s hat, and scanned the name of their horses with eager curiosity, the bell rang for the course to be cleared.

There was nothing unusual about the race. Having shown off their horses to the crowd, and allowed the spectators to

identify the colours of the riders with the description on the card, the competitors walked their horses up to the brow of the hill opposite the stand, where the starting-point was. A man waved a flag; down came the seven horses, with the gay colours of their riders glancing in the sun. A murmur ran through the crowd, as the three leading horses simultaneously cleared the first fence; and then the curiosity increased as a certain blue-and-white horseman was seen to steal ahead. But the others were only nursing their animals for the fine run down the slope in front of the stand and the water-jump in the hollow. Then up the hill and round again; the seven horses tailing off with cries of 'Rose has it! Rose has it!' as a gleaming point of pink was seen in front of the rest crossing the high broad field. And this rose-coloured rider kept the lead all the way round—for they had to go twice over the course—and finally won by a neck, letting Miss Mary win the first prize in the sweepstakes.

But why did Mr. Philip disappear? And why, as the preparations for the next race began to be visible, did the three young ladies begin to glance nervously at Lilian? And why did Mr. Stanberry come and seat himself beside her, and take to conversing with her in an unusually sprightly way? Mr. Philip had gone down by way of the grand-stand.

‘If he does not come back soon,’ said Lilian, glancing all over the crowd, ‘we shall have no sweepstake for the next race.’

‘Let me get it up,’ said Mr. Stanberry, ‘in case he should not be back in time.’

‘But where is he?’ she asked.

‘He has probably met some one he knows down at the stand.’

So Mr. Stanberry got up the sweepstakes, collected the half-crowns, and doled out the bits of paper, reserving one for Philip, and taking two for himself. The race was down as a ‘Maiden Steeplechase’ of fifty sovs. for horses that had never won before, and, as it happened, Lilian got a

horse called Rocketer, whose jockey's colours were green and gold.

‘Do change with me,’ said Miss Lucy to her. ‘I have got Black Dart; and my rider's colours are scarlet and black.’

‘If you like,’ said Lilian; ‘it is quite the same to me.’

So Lilian came into possession of Black Dart, and naturally began to look out for her own horse, with its colours. When the course was cleared, the various riders cantered up the course in front of the spectators. One of them, however, hung rather in the rear; and Lilian said,

‘That is my horse—the rider with the black jacket and the scarlet hoop. Why doesn't he come nearer?’

Indeed, he seemed rather to avoid being seen; and it was not until he had turned, and was making off for the starting-place, that he rose in his stirrups to give the assemblage a look at the pace of Black Dart. But at the moment of his turning the sunlight caught his face; and Lilian cried out, with a sudden qualm of fear,

‘O, that is Philip!’

‘So you have found out,’ said Mr. Stanberry with a good-natured smile. ‘He did not wish you to know at first. But don’t be alarmed; the course is a very easy one, I think; and there was not even a spill in the first race.’

She sat mute and still, with her face fixed, apparently hearing nothing of what was said around her. When the horses were ranged on the brow of the hill, her heart was beating as if it would choke her; and she held Jims’s arm with a tight grasp.

‘They’re off!’ cried the crowd; and down the hill came the line of horse, like a charge of cavalry, their various bright colours almost in a line.

‘The Dart leads—the Dart leads!’ was the next long murmur among the crowd, as the rider with the scarlet sash across his black jacket got a few yards to the front. Along the bottom of the hollow lay the first fence; and as the line of horses came down upon it, Black Dart was seen to rise first. Yet, strangely enough, when the

horse was high over the fence, and had apparently cleared it, it seemed to expose its side to the people on the drag; and the next moment it had gone down to the ground on its shoulder and head, throwing its rider heavily. In the same instant the next horse came thundering over on the top of them, and there was a cloud of brown dust.

Lilian uttered a cry that seemed to be the breaking of her heart, and covered her face with her hands.

‘Good God!’ exclaimed Mr. Stanberry; ‘I hope he isn’t hurt.’

‘Help me to get down,’ cried the girl, with a white face and piteous eyes. ‘I must go to him.’

But Mr. Stanberry seized her arm, and pointed. She caught sight of an old man with white hair fleeing like an arrow through the divided crowd; and at the same moment—for all this had occurred in a couple of seconds—she saw the scarlet-and-black rider pulling the reins back over the horse’s head, and putting his foot in the stirrup.

‘See—he is in the saddle again!’ cried .

Mr. Stanberry. ‘There he comes! Bravo, bravo! Well done! And listen to the people now!’

For as Black Dart came along the empty thoroughfare, laying himself down to a long swinging gallop, with his rider sputtering the dust from his mouth, and looking forward to the rest of the horses, there arose a long hoarse murmur of applause from the crowd. It was taken up by the people in the stand and around it, as Black Dart’s splendid stride let him gain slowly on one —two—three of the horses; and it broke into a ringing cheer as the horse was seen to rise to the water-jump and clear it, placing himself within a few lengths of the leader. Until that moment Lilian had sat icily cold and stiff, clasping Lucy Stanberry’s hand tightly. When she saw Black Dart get safe over the dreaded jump, she uttered a strange sort of laugh, endeavoured to say something, then trembled slightly, and finally sank backward white and apparently dead, with her companion’s arms round her neck.

‘George!’ shouted Mr. Stanberry to his servant below, ‘some water—quick!’

‘I don’t think there’s none, sir; nothing but the wine.’

‘Give me anything, you fool! Knock the head off one of the champagne-bottles.’

The broken bottle was handed up; Lucy Stanberry dipped her handkerchief in it; and presently there was a cold fragrant dampness on the girl’s forehead. To the pale cheeks there gradually came a colour as faint and tender as the blush in the inside of a white shell; and no sooner had she recovered life than she steadied herself on her companion’s arm, and looked anxiously all round the valley.

‘Don’t be alarmed,’ said Lucy Stanberry coaxingly. ‘He is all right; he won’t get such another fall as that. The odds are against it, my dear.’

The horses now came into view again, as they rounded the opposite hill. They were bearing down again on the same jump that had already nearly produced a catastrophe; and it was no consolation to Lilian

to hear the people cheering Blaek Dart, which was now a good third. She saw with dismay, too, that the fourth horse—a fine chestnut animal, whose silken coat shone in the sun—was running with an empty saddle. He had thrown his rider; and so determined was the brave brute to win, that he came valorously on with the others, with bridle-reins flying in the air. When they had got down to the fence in the hollow, the riderless horse was running second. All got well over the fence, himself among the rest; and as they came up to the corner near the stand the order was: White Star, first; Rocketer (without his rider), second; Teignmouth Lass, third; Black Dart, a dangerous fourth. Just opposite the stand, however, Rocketer, with his flying reins, overtook White Star, and pretty nearly cannoned against her. The latter horse swerved, and ran down the line of the crowd, scattering back the people, and tossing her head in the air, as her rider kept sawing at her mouth to get her into the stream again. When he had accom-

plished that object, he found himself at the tail of the field, with the race now lying between Teignmouth Lass and Black Dart, Rocketer having been caught.

‘Now you may look at them with safety,’ said Lucy Stanberry, when they were coming round the hill. ‘There are no more jumps: they have only to run in.’

‘And that is Philip who is first?’ cried Lilian, who was picking up a little interest with her reassurances.

‘No,’ said Miss Stanberry with a smile. ‘Teignmouth Lass is first; Black Dart is second.’

It was a close race. From the brow of the hill the two leading horses came down almost neck and neck; and the excitement of the crowd was intense. Their admiration for the pluck of the rider who had not despaired of the struggle after getting a remarkably bad fall at the very commencement, doubtless increased their sympathies with the second horse; and there were eager and frantic bets that, after all, Black Dart would win. There now lay between

these two competitors and the winning-post but the breadth of a field; and a line might have been drawn across the noses of the horses.

‘The Dart wins, the Dart wins!’ was the cry everywhere.

But, alas, Philip called upon his horse in vain. The brave animal had been severely tried to make up the leeway lost by its first fall; and now, when half a yard was all that had to be won, Black Dart did his best; but his best wasn’t good enough. Teignmouth Lass won the race; and her owner got the fifty sovereigns. But Black Dart, as he was led back to the stables, the reins hanging down on his neck, and the rider taking a little more of the dust from his own mouth and eyes, had all the cheering of the crowd, as was natural.

When Philip, in his ordinary attire, made his way back to the drag, and got on the top, they were all for talking to him at once; but Lilian, from the various emotions that possessed her, could say nothing whatever. She only took his hand

in hers, as if to assure herself that he was alive and safe.

‘Ah, you don’t like to scold him,’ said Lucy Stanberry. ‘Let me. I think it was shameful.’

‘Well, it was a bad one,’ said Philip. ‘I had a very odd sensation when I saw the hollow inside of two hoofs just over my face. But they lit on the other side fortunately.’

‘I did not mean the fall; I meant the riding in the race, and causing us all to suffer such agony. This young lady, for example, fainted; and we were all in a condition worse than fainting.’

‘But why did you tell her?’ he said, turning upon Miss Lucy with some sharpness.

‘We did not tell her. She recognised you from the first—by your moustache, I suppose.’

‘And aren’t you hurt at all, Philip?’ said Lilian, looking up.

‘Nothing beyond a bruise or two. I have a peculiar impression, though, that I

am in a merry-go-round, and that this circular valley is revolving on its own axis. The trees over there have a tendency to float backwards and forwards; and as for that hill, I believe it is breaking into waves. I propose that we have luncheon, to dismiss these phenomena.'

After luncheon, they waited to see the ladies' purse run for, and also a selling steeplechase. Thereafter they drove round by Watcombe, and so back again to Torquay.

When, in the afternoon, they came down upon Torquay from over the hills, they fancied they had descended into Italy, so rich and pure were the colours that lay before them: the town itself, with its wooded rocks and white villas, lying in a flood of yellow; with the tossing waters of the bay darkly blue, and broken only by a speck or two of red, where the sunset hit the sails of some herring-smacks off Brixham; and with the far-off line of Berry Head stretching out into a sphere of deepening purple.

This was their last evening in Torquay; and it was a very beautiful and memorable one. After dining at the hotel, they all went out together to stroll about the small town and its neighbourhood. The night had come on: and yet there was a peculiar glow where the sun had gone down; and this yellowish-green light shed a strange metallic glare on the lapping waves of the harbour. Overhead there was darkness; but on the water this level cold brilliancy fell, and twisted the dark hulls of the boats that lay and rolled. In time, that light died out; and there arose in the east a new light, which changed the hue of the sky into a dull warm olive. As yet there was visible only a glimmer of radiance from behind the trees on Warberry Hill; but as the silver rim of the moon rose among the firs, the town became gradually whiter, and the orange lights of lamps and windows high up along the rocks began to lose their intensity. The bay grew lighter, too; and Paignton Sands showed a curve of gray along the dark sea. Down in the harbour

the boats were dark in shadow; and you could see the yellow and red lights of the quay; but up there on the tall rocks the villas stood in the flood of the moonlight, and the ruddy lamps had grown pale. How fair and still and beautiful the place looked, when the moon had fully risen!—and over the black harbour rose the silvery heights of the town, with its faintly crimson windows; and overhead lay the calm of the still green sky. As they walked round by the shore, the murmur of the waves seemed to say farewell. It was their last evening there. *O lente, lente currite, noctis equi!*

CHAPTER III.

THE MAJOR SUCCUMBS.

‘ARE you a gentleman, sir ?’

‘Are you ?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Then I am not, sir.’

That was the anticipated overture to the interview which Mr. Philip expected to have with Major Delaney—a sort of preliminary breaking of the balls, as it were. But, with his adversary in hand, the Major was too experienced a player to chance any such losing hazard; and matters remained as they were, each refusing to make a decided stroke. Indeed, the Major was somewhat puzzled, as well he might be.

The first intelligence of what had happened between Philip and his father was brought by Miss Thormanby herself. That

young lady was surprised to find Philip's visits, which had gradually become fewer and were evidently mere courtesy-calls, cease altogether, without any explanation on his part. They had not quarrelled—indeed, for some time back, their relations had been rather more civil and agreeable than was at all customary. Mr. Philip had certainly avoided anything like a *tête-à-tête*, but he was very amiable and complaisant, even when Captain Dering was present.

What, therefore, had become of him? Mary Thormanby was much too proud to inquire—for some little time; then she thought she might walk up to see how Mrs. Drem was. As it happened, Captain Dering had also been struck by the same notion, and was helping himself to a glass of sherry in Mrs. Drem's drawing-room when Miss Thormanby was announced.

Mrs. Drem was rather in a dilemma; for she had been effectually mystifying Captain Dering about Philip's absence from the house and from town, and she knew well that no mystification of the kind was

possible before Mary Thormanby. So, facing the danger with something like boldness, Mrs. Drem begged Captain Dering to excuse them for a few moments, and walked off Miss Thormanby to the conservatory.

There, with all her sweetness and tact, she told the news to her companion—how Mr. Drem and his son had had a misunderstanding, and how Philip had, for a time, left London. Now there was no word mentioned about the cause of this quarrel; but Miss Thormanby divined it instantly. Perhaps she had heard some vague rumours; but, at all events, she knew that nothing less serious than the question of Philip's marriage could have produced this catastrophe. And the moment she perceived this, so soon did she assume the proper attitude for a woman under the circumstances.

‘I am very sorry,’ she said with a good-natured smile; ‘Philip was always a pleasant companion; and he may not be quite lost to us yet—even although he marries.’

‘Do you know anything about it?’ said the innocent little Mrs. Drem, with a faint start.

‘O dear, no,’ said Miss Thormanby. ‘But, of course, one imagines what is likely to be the cause of such an unfortunate occurrence.’

‘And you can understand,’ Mrs. Drem said in a whisper, ‘that I had a little delicacy in not mentioning this matter to you.’

‘But why?’ said Mary Thormanby, with the big gray eyes widely open.

‘I thought—I fancied Philip’s marriage, or any talk of it, might be a surprise to you.’

‘And so it is,’ said the young lady boldly. ‘A very pleasant surprise, indeed. You know the nonsense people talked regarding him and me; but, of course, there was nothing in it. We were too intimate—too near friends—to think seriously of marrying. I assure you no word of such a thing ever passed between us.’

‘O, I am so glad!’ cried Mrs. Drem.

‘Why?’ said Miss Thormanby, with a

peculiar smile ; and wondering whether the small clever woman before her actually believed all this.

‘For your sake, my dear,’ said Mrs. Drem, with an affectionate look—she would have tried to smile away the appetite of a hungry tiger, had she met him, in the same fashion—‘I was afraid Philip had behaved badly.’

‘O, not at all,’ said Mary Thormanby formally ; and then she added, so as not to compromise her uncle, ‘ You know it is impossible to say what other people may have expected. My uncle, for example, is hasty in his inferences, and may have imagined there was something between us more than mere companionship—flirtation, you know—and so forth. But Philip and I knew better.’

Mrs. Drem did not believe a word her friend said ; but she almost persuaded her to believe that she believed. Mary Thormanby was astute, however, and was not wholly convinced that Philip’s step-mother had not been acting simplicity.

Thus it was that Miss Thormanby got the news to carry to her uncle; and its effect on the burly and hairy warrior was surprising. He stamped up and down the room; he fumed, twisted his moustache, and slapped his thigh as if there were a sword dangling there—on the wrong side.

‘This is *my* business; *I* will see to this!’ he exclaimed.

‘What do you mean to do, uncle?’ asked Miss Thormanby quietly. ‘Do you mean to make him marry me?’

‘I *will* make him marry you—or he will answer to me else. By gad, am I a gentleman, or am I not?’

‘Of course you are, uncle,’ said his niece dutifully. ‘But as to your making Mr. Drem marry me, pray consider that I would rather not marry him. I am not more mercenary than other people; but still I don’t think Philip, with his education, is likely to have a comfortable establishment to offer one for some time.’

‘Do you mean to say,’ observed the Major solemnly—‘do you mean to tell me

that Philip Drem is really without a farthing?’

‘That is precisely his condition, uncle, as far as I can learn,’ said his niece.

‘By gad, what a deal of time I’ve wasted on that young man!’ said the Major reflectively.

‘Sure ye won’t ask him to marry her now,’ said Mrs. Delaney.

‘It is not a question of marriage, madam!’ exclaimed the Major, breaking out in a new vein. ‘It is my honour that is concerned: and I will let that shopkeeper’s son know what it is to insult a gentleman. By gad, ma’am, am I in her Majesty’s service, or am I not? And if I am, have I not a duty to perform to every man in it?’

‘If you let Philip Drem alone, uncle,’ said his niece with a laugh, ‘I don’t think the army will be any the worse. Why should you bother about it? Even if you get up a breach-of-promise case—and you couldn’t—do you think I would allow my name to be dragged into the papers?’

‘And there’s not a shillin’ to be got out

av him,' said Mrs. Delaney with a shade of contempt.

‘No, but there are bones in him—bones, ma’am; and some of them shall be broken before long. I am not the man to sit down tamely under an insult—from a grocer’s apprentice, by gad! We’ll see what a sound thrashing will do for him!’

‘Then you’d better hire somebody to give it him,’ said Mary Thormanby with a touch of pride (for no woman likes to hear a man whom she has honoured even by a flirtation made light of in this fashion). ‘I don’t know any man of our acquaintance likely to thrash Philip Drem without wishing heartily, in a very few seconds, that he hadn’t begun.’

‘It isn’t you that should stand up for him, amny way,’ said Mrs. Delaney.

‘And if he *is* a bully,’ continued the Major, accepting Mary’s hint, ‘can’t I shoot him?’

‘He might shoot you; and I don’t see what good shooting would do either of you. Indeed, uncle, it can’t be helped; and I

am not sure you pay me much of a compliment in making a fuss about it. Is he the only man in the world likely to marry me?’

‘Think of the money I’ve wasted on him!’ said the Major pathetically.

This was too much for his niece, who could not refrain from breaking into a hearty laugh. The warrior looked at her, scowled, and then grinned also.

‘You must have lost so much at three-penny whist, uncle,’ she said with mock sympathy.

‘Ye young baggage,’ he said gaily, and assuming a broad brogue in imitation of his wife, ‘tis yourself that knows how to chate a poor man out av his revinge. Give me a kiss, and we’ll let the desavin vagabone go his ways.’

Philip was consequently dismissed from the consideration of the Delaney household, for the time being; and Mary Thormanby began to wish that Captain Dering were not so very stupid.

But, farther up Park-lane, Mr. Philip’s absence was more marked. There an iras-

cible old man sat and complained of being left alone in his declining years by his only son ; and revenged himself by heaping reproach on the head of his meek and despairing wife. He blamed her for everything that occurred. It was she who had spoiled Philip as a boy ; it was she who had nursed his pride as a man, and taught him to apply ridiculous standards to the people around him. He forbade her to mention the name of Philip to him ; but he himself never ceased to harp on the theme, and to visit innumerable petty tyrannies upon her because of her want of sympathy.

Poor Mrs. Drem had, indeed, a hard time of it. She began to think that, after all, she had made a bad bargain ; and that life would have been altogether more pleasant to her, had she remained a humble teacher of music in a small provincial town. She had plenty of money at her command ; but what avail was it to her ? She went out less and less now ; for her husband, when he came home in the evening, inquired minutely after her day's occupa-

tions, and grumbled about her gadding. Had he settled down calmly to the purpose of making her life wretched, he could not have succeeded more effectually.

In the old days, Philip afforded her some aid and shelter. His father feared to expose himself before his son, and was never so unreasonable and capricious in his presence. Philip, too, was some company for her, when she dreaded having other company in her house. She never dared ask her own special friends to visit her; and Mr. Drem's temper was getting so much more wayward, that she gave dinner-parties as seldom as she could, even to his friends. Above all, she was afraid of his breaking out into open conflict with Sir James Kingscote; for the society of his light-hearted and charming daughter was one of the few pleasures remaining to the poor woman. And Mr. Drem seemed to have got it into his head that Sir James was somehow connected with Philip's departure; and that Violet had done him an injury in not marrying Philip without being asked.

Mr. Arthur was too prudent to speak to his uncle about his cousin, unless the former alluded to the matter. Even then, the subject was dangerous. But the observant placid young man saw that Philip's desertion was telling on his father; and that the old man was gradually, in spite of all his scornful boasting, coming to wish that the rupture were healed.

Healed, that is to say, in his own fashion. Had he chosen to do so, he could have made everybody, himself included, a good deal happier, by quietly recognising Philip's right to choose his own wife, and accepting Lilian Seaford as his daughter. But Mr. Arthur saw that, as time went on, this solution of the difficulty had become more impracticable than ever, so bitter and determined had grown the old man's obstinacy and his anger with her whom he regarded as a chief agent of his trouble. Mr. Arthur thought he might possibly meddle in the affair; but he had not the courage to recommend *that* settlement of it.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DRAMATIST'S TROUBLE.

THERE is nothing very tragic or even dramatic in the aspect of Sloane-street. That lengthy thoroughfare is not calculated to familiarise one with the poetic side of life; and it is conceivable that a young man of receptive nature, like Samuel Hickes, by constantly looking out on the monotonous gray pavement, and listening to the melancholy echoes of distant organs, had come to regard existence as a rather tame affair. The effect of Sloane-street on the mind must be to produce at length a disbelief in anything approaching to melodrama; and it is even probable that a man born and bred there, were he to become a geologist, would insensibly espouse the Uniformitarian theory of geological phenomena, and

scout the Catastrophic. It is well known to students of natural history that many animals—especially certain fishes and birds—seem to borrow their colour from that of their habitat. Now the prevailing hue of Sloane-street is gray.

Besides the fact of his living in Sloane-street, there were other reasons why Samuel Hickes should be rather sceptical about the possibility of applying a fragment of melodrama to the affairs of the actual world around him. He had lived, as Arthur Drem pointed out, a colourless and uneventful life, his chief cares being the securing and economical spending of a small income. A man with straitened means has seldom the chance of exercising the heroic passions, unless when he thrashes his wife. A man with plenty of money at his command can afford to indulge the whims of his fancy and affection—he can do mad things—and approach the region of the stage. What is impossible to a man in a narrower and more methodical manner of life (and this impossibility leads him to imagine it im-

probable in the case of another), is possible to him whose actions are not confined by the limits of so many sovereigns a week. The life of the one is a series of impulses; the life of the other is measured by the slow progress of office-hours. And not the least curious feature of this complication was, that Arthur Drein, himself educated under these formal conditions, had been led to conceive the possibility of getting beyond them by this very *Rotunda* drama, in which the author himself disbelieved.

The two oddly-assorted friends had several conversations about the theatrical *coup* which Arthur meditated; and that young man was several times on the point of abandoning the matter in despair over the weak faith of his companion. It was not that he found any difficulty in persuading Hickes that the project was feasible. On the contrary, Hickes admitted readily that his friend's proposal was reasonable; and, at the time, would almost give his assent to it, and undertake the singular duty. But on the next occasion that they met, Arthur

would be mildly enraged to find that his companion had fallen backward into doubt; and that the old arguments had to be again forthcoming.

At length Hickes said,

‘I do believe, Drem, you’re wrong. You don’t know what stuff these Rotunda plays are, or you’d see that it was impossible to do that sort of thing in real life. It is all very well in the theatre, where you can get everything made to your hand—the hero always comes round the corner at the right moment, and the villain always kills himself at the proper time. However, for a lark, I don’t mind doing this; I will go a certain way, just to try.’

‘You promise that?’ said Arthur, who was only too glad to get the engine on the rails.

‘A certain way, I say. I will try and get admitted into this Sunday-school. I will try and get introduced to this Miss Seaford—’

‘And then?’

‘Then I might ask her to marry me, to

crown the joke. Of course in the drama she would consent—for I am now acting the hero who is to do everybody a deal of good; but, as it is, I wouldn't back my chances with half-a-sov. And the first steps are not so easy as you think. What do I know about a Sunday-school? You never saw *that* at the Rotunda. And the only clergyman we have there is the Irish priest of the fat, humorous, generous kind—a splendid character to go down.'

'Well, you don't need to be afraid of a clergyman; he won't eat you.'

So it was that, on a certain warm Sunday evening, Mr. Arthur and his friend walked up to Hampstead. Hickes was rather sulky—partly because he dared not drink anything, and partly because he felt he was being goaded into making an ass of himself. If they had been doing the Rotunda drama in its pure simplicity, he might have felt more confident; but here they were approaching it by unfamiliar paths. Fancy trying to get to a melodramatic climax by way of a Sunday-school!

Sometimes, indeed, he submitted to the soft enchantment of the pictures which Arthur Drem painted for him. He was to touch the heart of this girl by his generosity and piety. He was to point out to her that her duty was clearly to throw over Philip Drem, and restore him to the position in society which he had forfeited for her sake. He was to show her that her path in life went with that of a poorer man; and he was to win this pretty companion for himself. Then there was Mr. Drem, with his cheque for 2000*l.* or 3000*l.*; and the grateful Arthur, endowed with a partnership, heaping favours upon him. Hickes dwelt upon this prospect chiefly after his midday dinner, when he had drunk a good deal of ale, and was smoking a thoughtful and drowsy pipe.

The evening was yet light when the two drew near the schoolroom, the arrangements of which had been unwittingly described to Arthur by Alec Lawson. Mr. Arthur said he would go for a walk over the Heath; and return in an hour.

‘You need only wait long enough to see how they go on. Keep up your courage, old boy!’

‘I’d rather venture into a fighting-crib in Ratcliffe-highway than into this confounded Sunday-school,’ said Hickes with an uneasy smile. ‘I wish I could have a glass of brandy.’

‘You might as well go in with cloven feet, a tail, and blue fire coming out of your mouth.’

‘Well, here goes!’

Arthur Drem walked on; and Mr. Hickes went boldly up to the door of the school-room and knocked. It was opened by a young girl, of whom he asked if he could see Mr. Miall. There came to him a tall elderly gentleman, with a bald head, a bland expression of face, white whiskers, and gold-rimmed spectacles.

‘I hope you will excuse my troubling you, sir,’ said Mr. Hickes in a hesitating way; ‘the fact is, I should like, if you have no objection, to see how your classes are carried on.’

‘By all means,’ said Mr. Miall at once.
‘Pray come in.’

Hickes followed the clergyman into the place; and the latter said,

‘Perhaps you have had some thoughts of joining us? We are always glad to add to our list of teachers.’

‘I am afraid,’ said Mr. Hickes with a charming modesty, ‘that I should betray a greater ignorance than the children in my class.’

‘We do not profess to be very learned,’ said Mr. Miall with a smile. ‘If you think of it, I would suggest your remaining simply as a spectator for an evening or two, to see what our method is. Then, as we have always set lessons, which the teachers as well as the scholars prepare at home—those of them, that is to say, who have no great experience—I think you would find no difficulty in taking the position. Do not let me press you; yet it is a good and necessary work, and the Lord is mindful of His servants.’

‘I wonder whether Mr. Drein will be,’

said Hickes to himself, with a sort of pathetic glance over what he was about to endure.

Yet he did not find this hour pass heavily. He was accommodated with a seat in front of a row of round faces, some of them not particularly clean; and, after the usual religious exercises had been gone through, and the catechising of the various classes commenced, he found it not uninteresting to listen to the odd matter-of-fact replies which the younger children gave to the questions. The lesson was the story of Eli and the young Samuel; and it was curious to notice how many of the round little heads in front of him had been busy in interpreting the relations between the high-priest and his young assistant by their own experiences. Curious, too, it was to see how tags of other explanations—vacant theological phrases, and so forth—lingered about the small brains, and were brought out to cover the retreat from a dilemma.

‘Should you be afraid to die?’ was one question.

‘I wouldn’t, if it wasn’t for the doctor,’ said one small and practical philosopher.

‘But the doctor visits you to do you good, does he not?’

‘No. He gives you physic.’

‘But the physic is for your good, is it not?’

‘N—no,’ was the answer, coming rather timidly, as if the philosopher knew he ought to be moral and uphold physic, while certain recollections constrained him to be honest and defy it.

‘The physic doesn’t do you good?’

‘No; for it’s bitter to take, and God will make you die whether you take it or not.’

Mr. Hickes began to think that, if he got many remarks like this addressed to him, his vocation as a teacher would not be such plain-sailing as he had hoped. Nor did he find it very easy to maintain his gravity in listening to certain homely explanations of such phrases as ‘the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle,’ or ‘And all from Dan even to Beer-sheba

knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord.' With regard to this last verse, Mr. Miall asked whether Dan was in the north or south of Palestine; whereupon a profound exponent of scriptural history replied that he was in the Den of Lions.

Mr. Miall now handed over the duties of the class to the official teacher, and, turning to the stranger, observed that he had seen something of the manner in which the teaching was conducted.

'There is not much difficulty, you see, when you know the lesson beforehand.'

'But I should be afraid of meeting with a poser in some of these chance replies,' said Hickes modestly. 'You can't anticipate the odd things they may say.'

'No; but you soon get accustomed to them, and treat them as you treat the perpetual "why" of a very young child. I have a little boy of five who, I can assure you, is a serious trouble to me in that way. It is necessary that he should believe me to be infallible, for I am laying the basis at present of all his moral knowledge; and he

must have no doubt that I am absolutely right. But what are you to say to a child who asks you *why* the lining of your coat is blue, *why* the fields are green, *why* the river is blue, or *why* the birds sing? I was telling him the other day that the lark sang up in the sky to cheer his mate, or perhaps to warn her in her nest below, whereupon he instantly said, “But Miss Seaford’s lark sings in the brass cage with nothing below.” By the way, that reminds me—we have one of our young ladies absent just at present—I believe she has gone down into Devonshire to see some friends—and we have had to apportion her class among the others. Now if you thought of joining us, I should collect this class again.’

‘But I should be in the way when the young lady returned,’ said Mr. Hickes.

‘Not at all,’ said Mr. Miall. ‘We have always plenty of work for willing hands, as it is desirable the classes should be kept small. I find a teacher has not time to get acquainted with his or her class when the lesson has to be hurried over. In any case

I could not give you Miss Seaford's class—I think we have no teacher to whom the scholars are more warmly attached, and they would resent being separated from her when she returns. But if you like to take up the class until she comes back from Devonshire, we can then find you some independent sphere of labour.'

'Thank you; I am very much obliged,' said the young man, whose suavity, and modesty, and gentleness, had evidently made some impression on the kindly clergyman. 'Perhaps, however, I had better only look in on next Sunday—I mean Sabbath evening—before actually beginning.'

The fact was that Hickes pleaded with his own conscience for this respite; for his stomach turned from the work before him, as the stomach of a strong man might turn from gruel. He would go through with the task he had undertaken; but he could not plunge into it all at once. It was with a sensation of unspeakable relief that he shook hands with Mr. Miall and found himself once more in the open air.

Mr. Arthur soon rejoined him, and Hickes found his friend in the cheerfulness of moods.

‘Now,’ said Arthur, ‘was there anything easier, once you tried it? A few days ago you’d have said it was impossible to get acquainted with Miss Seaford—now the way lies clear before you.’

‘Yes; and a pretty way too,’ grumbled Hickes. ‘I’ll have to begin and learn the New Testament off by heart.’

‘You couldn’t be better employed,’ said Arthur with grim malice; ‘it will do you a world of good. In the mean time have a cigar; and we will get down to my rooms, where you can reward yourself for your recent temperance.’

When they had at last reached their destination, Hickes was found to be somewhat discontented and sulky. Like most feeble natures, he had a good deal of small cunning; and he was determined that no one should make a cat’s-paw of him. What guarantee had he that Mr. Arthur would fulfil the vague promises he had made, in

the almost impossible event of his, Hickes's, marrying this girl? Might not he find himself saddled with a penniless wife; and the whole Drem family vastly obliged to him, but refusing to acknowledge that they ought to give him a penny?

Other and no less uncomfortable reflections crossed his mind as he walked up to Arthur's lodgings. Hickes was a weak irresolute sort of man, with no very definite convictions of right and wrong; but, after all, he had a dim sentiment about what was right; and, on the whole, he rather inclined to that. He would prefer doing right, if the right were easy, and if the wrong were not too tempting. He had no conception of any obligation to be honest, to tell the truth, or to respect other people's property; but, whereas breaking the law laid one open to the risk of exposure and punishment, doing right was productive of a certain small glow of satisfaction. On the other side, doing what was unfair or dishonest was distinctly unpleasant—it was rather shabby and mean.

Arthur had a notion that they ought to celebrate the success of the first step ; and, while his landlady was getting up some supper, he produced a couple of bottles of sparkling burgundy, one of which he opened.

‘Here you are,’ he said, handing a full glass of seething crimson to his friend. ‘Here’s good luck to our melodrama !’

Hickes could not resist the appeal, for he was very thirsty. He swallowed as much as he could at once without choking, and then he put down the glass with rather a sullen air.

‘What’s the matter with you, Hickes?’ said Arthur gaily. ‘Has the singing of hymns been too much for you?’

‘I’ll tell you what it is, Drem,’ said the other ; ‘I don’t half like this sort of thing. I’m not more thin-skinned than other people ; but it does seem to me precious mean to go trying to get this girl into trouble. You needn’t tell me,’ he added doggedly ; ‘I say, getting her into trouble. I don’t think we can do it ; but if we do, we ought

to be horse-whipped, and that's the long and the short of it. I don't say but what you're right in arguing that in the end it might be better for her not to marry your cousin. Very likely not; and, of course, it would be better, as you say, for him that he should not marry her. But that does not excuse us.'

'Why, the singing of the hymns *has* been too much for you!' cried Arthur. 'Who ever heard you preach morality in that way before? I declare you are quite impressive; and I foresee a grand career for you at the Sunday-school.'

Here the tray with the supper was brought in; and, when the woman had left, Arthur remarked, in a cool and careless way,

'Of course it is for you to judge; I don't insist upon your doing it. I have already bothered myself too much in convincing you against your will that the whole thing is feasible; and as you would reap more benefit from it than I should, I don't see why I should trouble farther. Let us

drop it, if you like. As you say, there are difficulties in the way. I undertook to show you that the preliminary difficulties were not so great as you fancied; and I think I have done that successfully—witness the events of this evening. But I can see from your manner that I should have continual trouble in arguing the matter with you; and there is no reason why our friendship should be broken off by some probable quarrel. Let us agree to drop it, from this moment forward. It was not of so much consequence to me; as I have always the chance before me of succeeding to my uncle's business, in any case. As for you, I daresay you would only be withdrawn from your proper sphere of literary labours by receiving a definite sum of money. Let me give you some of this cold tongue.'

Hickes looked up in a hesitating way. He had been advancing these objections chiefly to have Arthur answer them the more strongly, and so pacify his conscience. But he did not anticipate that his friend would quietly accept the situation.

‘You see,’ he remarked, ‘the last time we talked over the matter, it was all theory; and it didn’t much matter which way the argument went. But *now* the thing is coming closer, and getting to be practical, and one naturally pauses. I may consider myself as already a Sunday-school teacher. Next Sunday, or the following Sunday, Miss Seaford is coming to this school. I shall meet her. The certainty is that, if I like, I may become acquainted with her. Then there are many ways of getting introduced to the house—by calling on her friends for some subscription, or some such means. Then, as I get better acquainted with her, I may see her home, as I walk that way.’

‘My dear fellow,’ said Arthur, ‘now you are showing your inventive faculty. Didn’t I tell you the successive steps would come readily enough, when you made up your mind? And take my word for it, the climax we look for, though some distance off, will be reached in the same natural easy fashion. Look at it as at the top of a

mountain—a very striking and imposing thing; but, after all, it is only a matter of half-yards.'

'Writing these plays is such precarious work,' said Hickes, as if he were already putting in a plea with his own conscience. 'One never knows what may happen; and if anything did happen, it would be such a comfort and security to have a snug little sum by you.'

'And a pretty wife to console you. Depend upon it, Hickes, that the girl will very soon perceive that her marrying my cousin would have been a vast injury to him, and she will be grateful to you for having secured everybody's happiness. She mayn't be very complaisant at first, until she is tamed down a bit.'

'O, O!' cried Hickes; 'you mean me to marry her by force?'

'Well, not exactly,' said Arthur; 'but it is possible—one doesn't know—'

'You mean really to go in for melodrama? I didn't know when my Rotunda experience was to be called for. Bless you,

I know twenty ways of marrying girls by force. There is the grand abduction on the part of the wicked nobleman—carriage-and-pair, with servants in masks; there is the running off with the heiress, a sham priest, and a couple of men with horse-pistols standing by—'

‘Don’t talk nonsense,’ said Arthur; ‘you can choose your own way—you ought to know which is most likely.’

‘If Miss Seaford and all her friends would only stand for ten minutes on the Rotunda stage, I’d settle the affair directly. *Then* there would be no humbugging about a Sunday-school, and mincing airs, and the “Land of Canaan.” I do think, Drem, that since the creation of man there has been no rummer thing than this project of yours, of getting a bit of sham drama to run in the same harness with our own affairs.’

‘There won’t be anything sham about the drama,’ said Arthur, ‘unless you spoil it. I should like you to tell me how you draw the line between what is possible in

a drama and what is possible in life. The line is apparently a broad one in your eyes; I can't see it.'

'As I said before, you're stage-struck,' retorted Hickes with a laugh. He was evidently getting over his despondency and conscience-qualms.

'We shall see who is right when you've got a cottage on the banks of the Thames at Mortlake, with a charming wife, and a nice little fortune, with a garden all round the house, and a study in which you can compose dramas for theatres on this side of the water.'

'Dramas got out of my new experiences, I suppose,' said Hickes with a hiccup.

'Why not? After your old dramas have taught you what to do in life, you will put your new life back into new dramas.'

'Good! good!' cried Hickes, with a woolliness about his speech, for it took but a moderate amount of wine to upset this young man's balance. 'That's very good —I take the Rotunda drama, pass it into

my own experience, and turn it out again as a more genteel drama for the West-end. It's like the circulation of the blood—comes in one sort of blood into the lungs, goes out another. Or a machine, that takes in e—cats, and produces sausages. Or it's like a magical hat, that takes in raw eggs, and turns out a—a pie—'

‘By Jove, you’re making metaphors sufficient to stick all over a comedy, like a pudding stuck full of raisins. Why don’t you get into this brilliant vein when you’re writing your plays?’

‘Mustn’t drink at work,’ said Hickes solemnly. ‘I’d be for puttin’ jokes in, and openin’ the people’s eyes—I’d be for chaffin’ the villain, and makin’ the sweet young lady cuss and swear when she burst her gloves. The fact is, I’m not so dull a dog as I look; and if I was to open out on these characters of mine, I’d play old ’Arry with ’em. Law bless you, I’d pay them out for the trouble they’ve cost me this ma’y a day; and, if I was to get a fortune to-morrow, dash my eyes if I wouldn’t sit

down and write a burlesque of every blessed man, woman, and child I ever made talk in a drama. And I'd get some clever fellows to take the parts, and b'lesque the actin' too; and I'd have the tragedians, and the old heavies, and the scraggy chambermaids all sittin' in the front row of the orchestra, and I'd watch 'em gnashin' their teeth. Wouldn't I pay 'em out? Tell ye what, Drem—'s a grand notion. I once had an idea of bringin' all the chief people in Shakespeare's plays into a play by themselves; but that's nothin' to this—nothin'! For wouldn't I make it a real scarifier—and have the people talk the morality that the upper gallery believes in and practises, and not the clap-trap stuff it applauds? And wouldn't I stick into the play one o' them costermongers, that are satisfied with nothing but superfine sentiment on the stage?—and I'd show him sick wi' gin, and tearin' his wife's hair out, and thrashin' the brats when he goes home. And I'd—I'd—thank you for some so'-water.'

These pictures of the revenge of the

dramatist on the creations of his brain, and on his patrons, were thus brought to an abrupt conclusion; and shortly afterwards Mr. Arthur put his friend into a cab and told the driver to go to a certain number in Sloane-street.

Mr. Arthur would have been more tranquil in mind, had he not begun to see more and more of the vacillation of this young man. That one accustomed to revel in wickedness, and utter the most atrocious sentiments through the bass throat of a capacious tragedian, should be visited by squeamish doubts on a minor question of fairness, was not unnatural; but that he should be determined one minute to carry out this peculiar project, and the next minute turn away from it altogether, was to Arthur a matter of much anxiety.

CHAPTER V.

THE RIVER OF DART.

‘Don’t you think,’ said Philip, as they sat down to breakfast on the morning of their departure, ‘that it would be very hard to die at Torquay, and leave behind one the sea, and the clear air, and the sunlight? I shouldn’t mind so much dying in a dingy hole in Islington, I think—in a sickly atmosphere, with blinds drawn and bottles on the table. One might almost be glad to get quit of the smell of physic. And going away from here—leaving that blue bay and the green country round about it—seems in itself a sort of little death.’

‘I am so glad we are getting a beautiful day, though, to leave,’ said Lilian. ‘This morning, when I looked out, the sea was green and windy, and over there

at Brixham the land was quite hidden behind a mist of rain.'

'And when I came down, and caught her,' said Jims, 'she was nearly wud wi' delight, for there was a glimmer o' sun behind the mist.'

'And it was so curious to see a light green colour beginning to shine through,' said Lilian, 'the sunlight, you know, breaking on the hills behind the rain ; and then the clouds lifted, and you could see the slates of the houses in Brixham glittering across the bay, and the sea changing from green to blue. And now look ! the clouds have all disappeared, and the bay has grown still, and Berry Head has got misty and white out there !'

When their luggage had been dispatched to the station—to be sent on to Totnes by rail—they went down to the harbour, got into a small boat, and were pulled out to the yacht which Mr. Philip had hired. It was to be their last excursion in her—they were to leave her at Dartmouth.

And when the tiny vessel, outside the

harbour, dipped over to the gentle wind that was coming up from the west, Torquay was already receding from them. How fair and stately she looked, seated white and radiant on the summit of her green hills ! The morning sunlight shone on the great gray crags, and on the gleaming fronts of the houses, and on the dense foliage around the old abbey ; while round at Liver-mead the masses of red sandstone that finished the curve of the beach fairly burned in the sunshine, over the intense blue of the water. As they got farther out into the bay a sort of silvery haze seemed to dwell over the place, only broken here and there by the glitter of a window that happened to catch the rays of the sun.

‘O Philip, we have been so happy here !’ said Lilian, with tears coming into her eyes. ‘Why should we ever go back to London?’

And why ? And it seemed to him that behind and encompassing the beautiful and smiling picture that lay before them there was hidden a darker circle—full of dismay, and trouble, and the weariness of waiting—

into which they must soon enter. Why could they not stay here for ever? He was almost on the point of confessing to her the tender hypocrisy of which he had been guilty during this brief and happy time; and then he looked at her face and her anxious eyes, and could not.

‘You’re no fitted to be the wife o’ a man that has to battle wi’ these times,’ said Jims, putting his hand affectionately on her shoulder. ‘Ye mind me o’ a white kitten, that likes to play and frisk about a’ while wi’ a reel o’ cotton, and then snoozle down afore the fire on a thick rug. What would you think o’ a man that could content himself to live a’ his life up at the big hotel yonder, and do naething but kick his heels on the grass in the sun, when around him the world is working and storing, and they who have time are up in the great centre o’t—in London—fechting in Parliament for them that are otherwise engaged? Them that are working have nae time to think and understand about laws; and yet the laws are crushin’ them, and takin’ frae them

to give to the wealthy idlers in the land what ocht to gang to them that are starvin' for want o' work. The taxation o' the workin'-man should gang to help his poorer brethren, instead o' helpin' to fill the pockets o' them that are rich enough already. But folk are beginning to understand the duties o' the capitalists now; and there's many a rare battle to be focht o' mair consequence than Waterloo, or Peterloo either. And wi' a' this coming forward—singing i' the air, as it were—ye would like to have him leeve a' his life down by the shore here, like a limpet on the rocks or a dandelion in the grass.'

'Then there's to be no pleasure in life for anybody!' said Miss Lilian contemptuously. 'For if you happen to have no troubles of your own, you are to go and take up the trouble of other people—who won't thank you. What difference does one man make? If the nation wanted Philip, it would have told him so long ago. He is not of much consequence to it; but—but—he's of some consequence to me.'

She glanced timidly at Jim, with an arch look in her eyes and a conscious blush on her face.

‘You selfish little heathen!’ said Philip. ‘Do you know what blasphemy against the whole duty of man you are talking? If every single person were to take as an excuse that he individually would not be of much service—’

‘I am not going to argue,’ she said defiantly, changing her position. ‘You always get the best of me there, because you have been to college; but I know I am right all the same.’

‘Well, of course,’ said Philip; ‘since the beginning of time women have been celebrated—’

With that she put her hand over his mouth.

‘I have told you before,’ she said petulantly, ‘that I will not be called “women.” You are always putting me in the ranks with all the thousands of women, you know, and some day you will be losing sight of me. I don’t wish to stand to be compared

with everybody you know ; I wish to be all by myself. I am not a woman, or a girl, or anybody, or anything, except—just what you see !

And she threw out her two hands with a laugh, as if she were showing herself off.

‘Do you think you could ever be lost in the ranks?’ said Philip, taking hold of a curl of golden-brown hair that was near the white neck. ‘Wouldn’t this be a decoration to single you out? Do you think that Perdita, dressed in her lover’s clothes, would have passed muster among Frederick’s Pomeranian giants?’

‘I don’t think Perdita lived in the time of Frederick the Great,’ said she demurely.

‘Perdita lived then, lives now, will live always. When you and I shall have got out of this dream, that we call life, Perdita will still be going about with her flowers, and singing her snatches of old ballads.’

‘I wonder if she ever did live, and if she was happy?’ said Lilian. ‘I wonder if Shakespeare ever saw any girl that he thought might be Perdita? Don’t you

think he must have been desperately in love to have written so tenderly about love?—and don't you think he must have suffered dreadful misery about love to have written so much about that? Other things he could imagine—ambition, or pride, or avarice—without actually experiencing them; but I think he must have been very miserable about some one he loved before he could have written about it.'

'Why, what do *you* know of it?' said Philip with a look of wonder.

'I know only by anticipation,' she said wistfully. 'I know what I should suffer—if—if—'

She never completed the sentence. It was as if her soul had gone out of her, and was already moving in the years to come. Jims never liked these fits of strange brooding which fell over the girl's eyes, and he invariably interrupted them.

'I'm thinking,' said he, 'that Perdita had an extra chance of being happy, as there was nae Parliament then to tak' her sweetheart frae her.'

‘Parliaments are for old men,’ said Lilian sharply. ‘I would have no man go into Parliament till he was sixty, and fit for nothing else.’

‘You are too hard on me,’ said Jims with a smile.

‘O, I didn’t mean you!’ she said anxiously, and at once taking his hand, as if to atone for her indiscretion. ‘You know I didn’t mean you. I ought to have said that no one should go into Parliament who has got any relations, or any friends, or anybody who cares a pin about him.’

‘But look what such a Parliament would immediately do,’ said Philip. ‘They would set to work to destroy all conjugal and domestic ties, and make everybody as miserable as themselves.’

‘But nobody would pay any attention to what they did,’ said Lilian scornfully.

‘And we should have a very efficient Parliament,’ said Jims.

So the desultory careless talk flowed on, as they slowly made their way southward with the drowsiness of a hazy sunlight

around them, with the blue waves lapping along the side of the boat, and a curl of white at the prow; with a gentle wind just filling the sails, and causing the pennon overhead to flutter. And now they were about to see the last of Torquay and its beautiful neighbourhood; for they had nearly reached the point of Berry Head. The spacious blue bay lay behind them; down there, on the left, the Creek of Brixham, with its clustered houses and fleet of smacks; then the white line of Goodrington Sands; then the long brown curve of Paignton beach, on which Lilian had played for many a day when a child; and so round by the sandstone cliffs of Liver-mead to the massive hills and the shining villas of Torquay, with the Thatcher and Ore-stones jutting out from the point.

‘Good-bye, Tor Hill, and Waldon Hill, and Warbery Hill, and all the houses and trees you have!’ said Lilian, standing up and looking with a wistful smile towards the receding shore; ‘good-bye, dear Paignton, with your pretty sands!—good-bye,

Brixham, with your fishing-boats and your rocks! I wish I could take you all into my arms and kiss you! Good-bye! good-bye! good-bye!

And then, as the great cliffs of Berry Head interposed, and cut off, one by one, the various places on which her eyes lingeringly and fondly dwelt, the smile died away from her lips; and when the last house of Torquay was shut out from her sight she sat down in the boat, and covered her face with her hands, and sobbed bitterly.

The gates of the old world—the fair world of her childhood and youth—seemed to for ever shut; and there now opened before her another world, full of indeterminate terror and sadness, and the pain of renunciation. What might come she knew not; but she felt that she would have to meet it alone.

‘My darling,’ said Philip, laying his hand tenderly on the downcast head. ‘we shall see all these places again.’

‘We shall never see them again, we two

together,' she said, looking up with a white face.

'If you say anything like that again,' said he, 'do you know what I shall do? I will have this veritable and actual boat in which you sit turned round; and in an hour or so we shall run into Torquay harbour. Then, do you know what will follow, you timid little bird? Mrs. Lawson will be telegraphed for to bring down a special license with her from London; we shall be married in Torquay; and not only shall we see all these places together, but we shall not have them out of our sight ever after; for I shall remain in Torquay, and support my household by becoming—what shall I say?—a billiard-marker. No; I should lose form down here. I shall become a coastguardsman, and spend the day in leaning over the parapet of the quay and staring at nothing; or I may drive a cab. Do you know there is nothing more probable than that I may have to earn our joint living by driving a cab?'

She looked up with a glance of surprise;

and he saw that he had made a mistake. It was not time yet to speak of what was ahead in his affairs. So he adroitly continued the conversation, as if the chance remark had been only a bit of the idle talk in which they had been indulging; and so, by and by, he won her round into a more cheerful humour.

And now the new line of coast, stretching down into the white haze of the south, opened out before them; and they sailed past the immense cliffs of limestone and rock, which fell sheer into the green water, with here and there a shelf of slate gleaming through the thin veil of mist that the sun had thrown over the land. Spectral and vast loomed these silent cliffs through the heat, their craggy headlands throwing natural bridges out into the water, their steep sides seamed with rugged scars and black lines of caves. Over their smooth summits stretched a faint surface of green, with a few sheep or cattle visible only as specks in the light; while in some sheltered bay the rocks sloped more gently down to

the water. There were trees and a cottage or two lying warm and snug in the valley, and a line of white shingle where the dark sea met the shore. From the splendid masses of Sharkham on to Down-end Point, these successive promontories and bays were sufficiently familiar to Lilian ; and yet she did not care to name them, so strange and unfamiliar they appeared in this dream-like haze. Indeed, at any time, there is something very solemn in the look of the tall and silent cliffs, that stand unmoved above the great murmuring plain of the waves, and are so still. You cannot but think that an awful quiet has fallen upon them, because they have through so many years held commune with the night and with the stars, and that they have grown mournful because they have looked over the sea towards the gray east, and beheld the mystery of innumerable dawns.

Then, as they drew near the estuary of the Dart, they ran close under the black Mewstone—the solitary jagged mass of rock that stands out in the sea. Far below them

stretches the long blue line of Start Bay, losing itself in a silver mist in the south ; and as they turned inward from the sea, they found themselves in the green haven of Dartmouth, with the old-fashioned little town huddled along the side of the steep hill that overlooks it.

Having rowed ashore to Kingswear, on the opposite side of the river, they put up at the Yacht Hotel there ; and Jims must needs go out on the balcony, to look at the broad stream, the boats, the quaint houses, and the lofty stretches of pasture and fields of wheat that seemed to be tumbling over on the chimneys. The midday sun was shining down on the place ; but the hill is so vertical that, while it remained in shadow, the light only caught here and there on the top of a tree or the slates of a house ; and these shone out in yellow from the misty blue behind. A still, sleepy, old-fashioned little place, with picturesque houses and walls, built down into the clear green deeps of the Dart, with glimpses of rounded hill and sunny pasture glimmering at the end

of precipitous streets, and with a few villas on the outskirts buried in trees, and perched upon the steep rocks that rise from the water.

‘This is anither place like Torquay,’ said Jims. ‘A man must either have his nose level wi’ his neighbour’s door-step, or else find himsel’ lookin’ doun his skylight-window. I wonder how they keep the bairns frae flinging stanes doun the chimneys.’

But Miss Lil, as they sometimes called her, would have no one say a word against the place; for it appertained to the Dart, and the Dart she had insisted on their seeing before returning to London. She had conducted them all over the neighbourhood that she was familiar with; and now, like the proprietor of a merry-go-round, she was going to give them ‘a good one for the last.’ When they praised the beauty of the county, she was pleased; but she always said, ‘You have not seen the Dart yet.’ And now they were on the very threshold of the mystic and beautiful region; and

they were to carry the memory of this day's wanderings with them to London, whither they were bound on the morrow.

‘What if it were to begin and rain now?’ said Philip, as they sat in the hotel.

‘I should make you wait here for days or weeks till it cleared,’ said Miss Lil decidedly.

‘You talk as if you were the owner of the whole county, you arrogant little woman!’ he said. ‘Whereas all that belongs to you is some of the blue of the sea that you have stolen into your eyes by constantly looking out on Tor Bay.’

‘The Dart is my river,’ she said proudly. ‘You talk of those rivers abroad that you have seen. My river is the Dart; and you will see whether it is not prettier than any river you ever saw.’

‘What shall be my punishment, if I say it is not half so fine as the Danube, for instance?’

‘Why, your own blindness,’ she said with a toss of her head.

‘But you have never seen any foreign river.’

‘That doesn’t matter,’ she observed sententiously. ‘I *know* the Dart is the prettiest river in the whole world.’

‘And I know who is the *absurdest* little woman that ever looked on the prettiest river in the whole world. I wish I could write poetry, Miss Lil, and I would call you the Wild Rose of the Dart.’

‘But roses don’t grow in rivers, you stupid boy!’ she said.

‘They grow by the banks of rivers; and isn’t that the same?’

‘There, again!’ she said petulantly.—‘Whenever I talk common sense—’

‘Which isn’t often,’ he interjected.

‘You bring logic into it, just to show you have been to college.’

‘I wish college had taught him simple addition,’ said Jims, frowning over a scrap of paper which Philip had handed him. Mr. Philip, on being called upon to say what was the share of the hotel expenses at Torquay which fell to Jims and his young

charge, replied vaguely, *5l.* Jims was not satisfied; for he would not entertain the notion that Mr. Philip should pay anything beyond his own expenses; so that Philip was forced to draw up an imaginary bill, which he presented to the old man.

‘Three pounds ten and three pounds ten make five pounds!’ said he. ‘I’m thinking ye’ll no make your fortune as a clerk.’

‘Very well,’ said Philip, getting hold of the paper, crumpling it up, and pitching it into the grate. ‘You *would* have a statement, and now you’re not satisfied. If you want to give me other five pounds, do. Between the two of you, I lead a happy life: bullying and grumbling from the one, sneers and contempt from the other. Now it is my arithmetic, now it is my logic, that is faulty. When I undertook to come down here, it was to have a pleasant trip, not to go into training for a senior wranglership.’

‘When you gentlemen have quite done fighting,’ remarked Miss Lilian with a gracious politeness, ‘you may follow me to the

church out at the point ;' with which she left the room.

The next moment Jims, still looking down from the balcony, cried out,

'Losh me ! there she is, all by herself, in the ferry.'

'Come along, then,' said Philip ; 'we shall soon overtake her.'

'Deed no,' said Jims ; 'I'm for nae mair scrambling among rocks like a partan. I've had plenty o't lately. Gang after her yersel'.'

Mr. Philip, rushing downstairs, found that the ordinary ferry-boat had left, but that a horse-ferry, with two or three horses and a wagon, was just being pushed off. Without considering, he jumped on to the raft as it was leaving the landing-stage, and took his place by the neck of one of the horses. It was an unlucky resolve. The small steam-tug which generally drags the ferry across was not in use ; and there were only two men, with long oars, to pull this heavy craft across a broad stream, with a swift current running down. Their plan

of operations was to pull the thing up the bank, where there was a slight back-current, and then let it float down with the stream to the opposite side; so that Mr. Philip found himself being slowly taken up the river, while the ordinary ferry-boat was quietly plying both ways below. Nor was there much more progress made when the raft got farther over; and, indeed, a more ridiculous spectacle could not well be conceived than he then presented, standing, angrily and helplessly, in the middle of the river, with Jim's grinning at him from the balcony of the hotel, and with Miss Lil ready to die laughing at him from the opposite side. He shook his hand at her; in reply, she kissed her finger-tips to him in mockery, for there was no one near to see. When at length he gained the opposite shore, and began to scold her for her hard-heartedness, she was drying her eyes from the effects of her merriment, and was assuming a more sedate and gentle air, with which to walk into and through the old town.

‘If the Dart is your river,’ said he, ‘you might find some better means of taking people across.’

‘Did you never try a horse-ferry before?’

‘No.’

‘Then you deserve credit for your courage,’ she said, laughing.

He was glad to see that the happy light never once died out of her eyes. She was, in truth, in the brightest of spirits; for she looked forward to charming the hearts of her two companions with the scenery of her pet river as they sailed up in the afternoon. In the mean time the day was warm and fine; and there was overhead a clear intense colour, almost as deep as that in her eyes, as she and her companion wandered out to the rugged point on which the old church of St. Pedrock is built, overlooking the narrow channel of the river and the broad ocean. They entered the small graveyard that is perched out on these rocks, and glanced over the brief narratives of deaths by sea and land which were inscribed on the weather-worn tombstones, with pathetic

assurances that these poor men and women were only 'gone before.'

'And here we must bid good-bye to the sea,' said Lilian, with more cheerfulness in her tone than when she saw Tor Bay fading out of sight. 'How blue it is!'

They had strolled up from the old church and the ruined castle to the lonely downs above; and from the summit of the hill they were gazing out on the sea and the far ships. The wind had risen somewhat, and the great blue plain before them had ruffled streaks of green across it, with here and there the deep purple of a cloud-shadow moving briskly over the water.

'Look at it hard,' she said to Philip, 'and then shut your eyes suddenly, and turn round, and let us go away. And then ever after, when you want to see the sea, you need only shut your eyes and you will see it, just as it is now.'

'When I want to see the sea,' he said, 'I shall look for it in your eyes, not by shutting my own.'

And so they turned away, and left the

sea. When they had gone down the hill-side, and got into the cool shadow of the trees that overhang the road, Lilian stopped and put her hands over her eyes.

‘Yes, yes, yes,’ she cried; ‘it is all here! Shall I tell you what I see? First there is the old gray church and the castle, and then the steep rocks going straight down to a little bay, with green water, and rocks, and seaweed, and white sand. Then out there is the sea, blue and green, with a few tiny tips of white; and then, farther out, it gets gray, and there are ships on the line of the sky. Don’t you see it too, Philip?’

He took down her hands from her eyes, and held them.

‘Look up,’ said he; and she turned the beautiful frank eyes towards his.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I can see it all here—every bit. Only the sea that I look at is all blue; there are no clouds near; and it is safe and kind—not treacherous and angry like the one you speak of; and then, besides, it is a sea that I can take up to

London, and it will shine there among the smoke, and people will not know where you and I get the sunshine for our house.'

'Our house?' she said almost sadly; and so, to prevent her thinking about this hazardous future, he began to try the effect of various wild-flowers in her hair, and she took one of them and kissed it, and gave it to him. They were so young then, both of them; and overhead the sky was so fair.

By the time they returned, Jims had got luncheon ready, and had provided a suitable and modest repast. Philip grumbled, nevertheless, saying that in honour of the Dart, and of the fair young show-woman who was to be their guide, something more decorative in treatment should have been ordered. You would have thought that this young gentleman had the mines of Golconda in his waistcoat-pocket to hear him speak; whereas the fact was, of the two, Jims was the moneyed man, and Mr. Philip he who ought to have been economical. But Mr. Philip was pes-

sessed by the thoroughly masculine notion that one way to please and gratify a woman is to give her ostentatious meals, such as would suit an elderly clubbist; and was not this the last day of Lilian's pilgrimage in Devonshire?

You should have seen the sedate little empress—dressed all in black, with a touch of white muslin round her neck—seated in the stern of the small steamer that was about to go up the Dart. At first she was calm and gracious, suffering herself to be pleased with the cool breeze, and the sunshine, and the moving by of the various vessels. But when the tiny steamer had left its moorings—when Dartmouth was slowly left behind, and the wonders of the river began to unroll themselves as they steamed up the green tide—her repose and gentle satisfaction quite left her. She became anxiously delighted, and would give her companions no peace until they had examined every corner and bend of the stream. Now it was:

‘O Philip, isn’t it lovely?’

Or, again :

‘Look, look, Mr. Lawson ! These are the Mount Boone woods ; and see how they come down to the river’s edge ! And that is Dittisham—that cluster of cottages smothered in orchards — and above it is Bramble Torr ! Do you see how green the water is with the sea ?’

So they sailed up between the over-hanging woods, that lay dusky and warm in the sunlight, and had their masses of light foliage mirrored in the smooth stream below. They glided as in a dream past the pleasant banks of this pretty Devonshire river—past the tiny villages, with the gray spire of a church visible over the trees—past steep hill-sides with cattle and farm-yards on them—past verdant knolls, surmounted by some big old house. It was all very pretty, doubtless ; and perhaps to one who was familiar, as Philip was, with the Scotch lochs and the South German rivers it was no more than pretty ; but they had to vow and swear, both of them, that there was no river like Lilian’s river.

At length even the wonders of the Dart came to an end, as the small steamer was finally roped to its moorings outside Totnes town. And here they found their luggage waiting them at the hotel; and, having wandered about the old place and visited the castle, as in duty bound, they had some tea, and prepared to go out for a pleasant walk in the sunset.

Jims preferred to stay in-doors, probably fancying that the two young people would as soon walk by themselves. Philip, however, got an opportunity of telling him in a few minutes' private conversation, of all that had occurred and all that he had concealed. Jims was astonished nearly out of his powers of speech.

‘Were ye clean wud to come down here and spend money, when every shilling was o' consequence to you?’

‘Don't you remember Lilian saying something about wishing to have this little trip a time of perfect enjoyment?’ replied Philip, as if that were a complete answer.

‘Bless me,’ said Jims, ‘if a man is to

make a fule o' himself every time a woman asks him!—and I'm sure the lassie would never have allowed it, had she known—'

'That was precisely why I didn't tell her.'

'And ye'll catch it when you do!' said Jims with an angry smile. "'Deed, I never heard the like! When you should ha' been saving up every farthing ye had—when you should ha' been looking out for work—to come stravayging down here, and living like a king at that wearifu' hotel in Torquay. I never heard o' sich a daft-like trick in my born days.'

'I think I never did anything more sensible all my life,' said Philip. 'The chances were that she and I should never have an opportunity again—at least, not for a long while—of having such a pleasant time together; and, if I had told her, she would not have allowed it, as you say. What signifies a few pounds?'

'Tell me this,' said the old man abruptly. 'Do you mean to make your own living, marry a wife o' your own choosing, and be

maister o' your own coming and going? Or do you only mean to make-believe you're doing that—and hang on i' th' expectation o' your father turnin' round?"

‘ You don't know my father,’ said Philip, ‘ or you wouldn't speculate on that chance. You might as well hope for Bramble Torr to turn round.’

‘ Then you are positeevely determined to gang your ain gate?’

‘ Most decidedly,’ said Philip—‘ that is to say, I mean to do what that probably would be, if it were translated into English. I daresay I know what you mean; and I mean to “gang my ain gate.”’

‘ I'm no sayin' you're right,’ said Jims with grave Scotch caution, ‘ and I'm no sayin' you're wrong. Every man has his ain notion o' what's better for him in this world; and it is no great maitter in any case, for it lasts so little a time. But, my certes, if you mean to make your own living, you'll find out that a few pounds is of mair consequence than ye seem to think.’

‘Probably,’ said Philip with a fine carelessness. ‘But the money I spent down here would have been good for nothing in the way of helping me to work. The want of it will be a better spur.’

The entrance of Lilian at this time prevented their farther talk over the matter. She had on her out-of-door costume, and stood at the door of the room.

‘Who is coming?’ she said. ‘I shall be your *valet de place* again.’

Philip and she left together. They passed out of the town, and got down to the side of the Dart, by the alders. The great glow of light from the west was shining along the tops of the woods, and farther down the crimson overhead was reflected in the bend of the stream, that lay like a line of blood between the green meadows. Most of the birds were silent now; but the black-bird’s flute-like note was heard from among the trees down by the river; and occasionally, as they strolled along the narrow path, a thrush would send out a long, clear, wavering trill from the deeps of the bushes.

along the bank. They met no one but a young girl, who was coming home with both hands filled with flowers. She bade them 'good-evening' as she passed, and her voice seemed strange in the silence of the place. For Lilian had spoken scarcely a word since they had left the inn.

'Why are you so very quiet?' he said. 'Are you not pleased that our trip has been so pleasant throughout, and has closed so pleasantly?'

'It has been very pleasant, has it not?' she said (her veil was down, and he could not see the expression of her face). 'And this is our last evening, and our last walk together.'

'For the present, yes,' said Philip cheerfully.

She said nothing farther for some time, until they had gone down to the bend of the river, where the red colour lay, and beyond that there was the dusk of the twilight, from which they both instinctively turned.

'Let us go back,' she said; and there

was something in the tone of her voice, as they turned away from the ruddy stream and the silent trees, that made him regard more attentively the inscrutable veil that was over her face. The hand on his arm had been trembling for some time, and all at once she said, in heart-breaking accents,

‘O my love, my love! Shall we never be here again, you and I?’

She turned her face up to him, and he saw now that she had been crying all this time, as they were walking down the river-path. And it seemed to him then that something more was required than the ordinary gentle assurances to remove the passionate despair into which she was plunged. So he said,

‘Why do you ask that, Lilian? What are you afraid of? Do you know that, before I came down here, I gave up everything in the world for you, so sure I was that we two should go through the world together?’

And then he told her, rapidly and

clearly, the position in which he stood towards herself and towards her friends.

He had long dreaded this necessity; and he had pictured to himself what her reception of these disclosures would be. She would not consent to this abnegation for her sake; she would implore him to go back to his family; she would be in misery over what had happened, and blame herself for it.

Surely she could not have understood? The veil she had drawn back from her face; and now she looked up to him with a strange, proud, confident look in her eyes.

‘Is what you tell me true?’ she said.
‘You have done all this for me?’

‘And have I not done right?’

There was an almost wild look—of courage, and joy, and triumph—passing across her face, and she said,

‘I am not afraid now, Philip. It seems to me that you have come so much nearer to me, that I need not be afraid. We will go to London together. It will not make us afraid now, will it? O my dear, my

dear, you have made my heart full of love for you!"

Her eyes were wet and wild ; yet there was joy shining in them. She turned round to have one last look at the Dart ; and then she said to him, in a low voice,

'A few minutes ago, Philip, I wished that I was lying underneath the stream. You know they say,

"O river of Dart ! O river of Dart !
Every year you break a heart ;"

and I thought it was mine the river had taken this year. And now I feel so strong and brave, because you have shown yourself so brave ; and I am ready—O, I am ready, my dear, to face twenty Londons, and fight them all for your sake !

Then he stooped down and kissed her, almost solemnly ; and he felt on his forehead the light touch of her lips, as though the wing of a butterfly had touched him. It was the first embrace she had bestowed upon him ; it was his royal accolade ; and there he became her knight, and swore to be faithful to this sweet mistress for ever.

CHAPTER VI.

ABROAD IN LONDON.

SHORTLY after his arrival in London from Devonshire, Mr. Philip walked from his lodgings in Paddington to a 'livery establishment,' kept by a certain Mr. Dufton, in Euston-road. Dufton, in former days, had been coachman to Philip's father; but had, through a quarrel, left Mr. Drem's service and started as a cab-proprietor. He had succeeded so well that, in addition to this smart and well-furnished house that overlooked the stable-yard, he had bought a pretty little cottage at Ewell, whither he occasionally sent his wife and children.

At present, the family seemed to be at home; for no sooner had Philip been shown into the parlour (the extreme brightness and neatness of which showed that Mrs. Dufton was an excellent housewife), than a

small and sturdy young gentleman of about four years of age walked boldly into the room, stood in the middle of the floor, and critically examined the stranger.

‘Well, do you know who I am?’ asked Philip of the owner of the wide blue eyes that were staring at him.

Having again coolly surveyed him from head to heel, the hero of the flaxen hair and the sturdy legs said,

‘Oo is him what belongs to the big dog.’

‘How do you know I ever had a big dog?’ again asked Mr. Philip.

The small gentleman walked to the table, and, pointing to a photographic album (which he dutifully refrained from touching), remarked,

‘Him is in here.’

Sure enough, on opening the book, Philip found in one of the pages a portrait of himself—a lad of fourteen, with a velvet jacket, shiny boots, and a riding-whip, standing beside the big dog which had earned for himself the honour of remembrance and recognition from Master Dufton.

‘What’s your name?’ he said to the boy.

‘Henry Dufton,’ said he; adding, somewhat irrelevantly, ‘The butcher wasn’t been to-day.’

‘Would you like to have a big dog, that could eat up all the bears and the wolves? Wouldn’t you be afraid if you saw a bear coming down the street?’

‘No,’ said the small hero valiantly; ‘me ood like to see a bear; me ood take a gun and bang him!’

‘Isn’t that a pretty gentleman?’ continued Philip, pointing in the album to a portrait of a very High Church clergyman in magnificently-coloured robes, and with a touch of pink in his cheeks.

‘What oo says?’

‘I say, isn’t that a pretty gentleman?’

‘Her is a lady,’ objected Master Henry.

‘Did you ever see a lady with a moustache?’

‘Her has a gown and ’ticoats on,’ replied the boy, as if that settled the matter about the sex of the person; and then he added sagely,

‘Her cannot put on her boots and go out, for her is in a pitture.’

At this moment Mr. Dufton senior entered the room, and was at once greeted by his son’s asking him—pointing to Philip meanwhile—‘What’s him’s name?’—a question which he ventured to overlook.

‘Law bless me, Mr. Philip,’ said the small wiry man with the tight trousers, stiff little collar, and the brown-red face that reminded one of a frosted pippin, ‘it’s a long time since I see you. Times are changed since then, ain’t they? You see,’ he added, looking round the comfortable and cleanly room, ‘I ain’t got much reason to regret the row as ’appened between your father and me, when he throwed the bottle at my ’ed. And I don’t bear him no malice, Mr. Philip; and if so be as you want anything in my way, I’ll let you ’ave as good a thing as you’ll see.’

‘I do want something in your way, Mr. Dufton,’ said Philip. ‘I want you to give me some work.’

‘Law, you’re joking, Mr. Philip!’

‘No, I’m not.’

‘Well-a-day,’ said the good-natured Dufton compassionately; ‘and ’as it come to that! Poor old gentleman! It’s a bad thing for him at his time of life: and if I can do anything, I will. I don’t bear no malice, as I say. And them downfalls will happen to the richest on us—’

‘No, you mistake,’ said Philip. ‘My father has suffered no change of fortune. He is as rich as ever he was.’

‘Ah, I see,’ said Dufton with a sage nod. ‘A quarrel. Well, if I must tell the truth, Mr. Philip, I’d sooner do you a good turn than him—not that I wouldn’t let bygones be bygones if things was come to the worst, and the old genelman become hard up. But as for my giving you work, Mr. Philip, you must be joking, as I said—’

‘I am not at all,’ said Philip. ‘I don’t propose to start as a cabby all at once; but I want to know that I have that to fall back on, if everything else fails. Do you understand? Now tell me, how much could

I earn if I were to persuade you to let me have one of your cabs ?'

' You'd have to persuade me first,' said Mr. Dufton with a dry little laugh. ' I don't say as you can't drive, or that you'd be bad to the osses—because I know you're all right both ways. But law, sir, I have the character of my cabs to keep up; and think of the chaff you and me would get when you was on the ranks, and didn't know a single place as you was asked to drive to.'

' But I could learn that easily,' said Philip. ' I know a good deal of London; and I could walk about for a few days, and study a map.'

' O, maps is very fine !' said Mr. Dufton; ' but they ain't got brick walls down on 'em. You can go slick through a row o' houses or a brick wall on the map; but your horse wouldn't go. Now suppose you was to come to a brick wall with your cab, what would you do ?'

' Turn round, and go back.'

' And have your fare cussin' and swear-

in' at you hawful. O, I know plenty of men as thinks it's a jolly easy thing to drive a cab because they know the road from Pall-Mall to Charing-cross, or from Waterloo-place to Regent-street. But, bless you, if they was to go on a stand, they'd find out they knew no more o' London than the babe unborn. I don't say as I won't give you one o' my cabs, if nothing else is to be done; but I'd rather let you help my clerk, or do some other work—if so be as you're serious about it, Mr. Philip. And it's dry work talkin' like this; and perhaps you won't mind having a glass of sherry-wine with me?’

This was only a *ruse* on the part of Mr. Drem's old coachman. He was proud to hear himself called ‘Mr.’ by Mr. Drem's son; and he wished to show Mr. Philip all the comfort and luxury that he had fairly earned for himself by his own industry. So he invented this excuse for sending for Mrs. Dufton—a smiling little woman, with rosy cheeks and black hair—who forthwith not only placed wine-glasses and cut decanters

on the table, but must needs bring in Miss Sissy, a small girl of six, and the baby, to have them shown off. All these three wonders had flaxen hair and blue eyes, like their father; and, indeed, nothing could equal the cab-proprietor's pride in exhibiting these and the other ornaments of his snug little household.

'She's the most intelligent child,' he said, taking up the baby, and looking at the small lump of soft humanity. 'She is only eleven months, and we can understand what she says every word.'

To Philip's uninitiated ear all the language the prodigy could utter was 'Goo, goo, goo!'-but that goes a long way with admiring parents.

Then there was Miss Sissy, who was not at all so amiable a character as the frank and sturdy young gentleman her brother. Sissy was conscious of being looked at; was greedy, and knew that the presence of a stranger gave her the whip-hand of her mother. No sooner had she caught sight of Mr. Philip than, standing at some dis-

tance, and keeping her eyes on him, she began to say,

‘Pity, O Lord, Thy feeble child,
By sin, alas, too often ’guiled.
Thou hast ’passion for the weak,
The boosed reed Thou ’not break;’

which was immediately followed by a demand for a ‘bistit.’

‘Dear me,’ said Mrs. Dufton with a sigh of happiness, ‘Sissy *will* repeat them hymns. She’s choke-full on ’em. Get away, Sissy, and don’t annoy the gentleman.’

Sissy had gone forward to Mr. Philip’s knee, and informed him that she could spell ‘sugar.’

‘If you do,’ said Philip, ‘I’ll give you another biscuit.’

Thus encouraged, Sissy began; and keeping an eye on her mother’s face, said tentatively, ‘B, u, t, t.’

Something in her mamma’s expression told Sissy she had gone wrong; so she instantly changed the direction of her efforts, and said,

‘M, i, l, k, sugar; and Samson was the

wisest man, and Moses was the strongest man, and Sommon' (presumably Solomon) 'was the man wis the longest hair. Sissy ood rather have a picce of sugar than another bistit.'

Indeed, Sissy sulkily refused the biscuit which Philip offered her, and said to her father,

'Sissy want a piece of sugar, dada !'

The father, finding no sugar obtainable, and seeing a storm brewing in the distance, proposed that Sissy should go upstairs, and play a tune on her papa's concertina. These Chiltern Hundreds of infancy were accepted by Sissy, who, like some more elderly people elsewhere, made a pretence of retiring into private life, only to make more noise than ever. The remainder of Philip's interview with the cab-proprietor had a running accompaniment of melancholy howls and squeaks from the chamber overhead, representing the torture of the concertina ; while the more thoughtful and manly Henry sat still and quiet on the hearthrug, watching Philip's face narrowly, and only inter-

rupting the conversation by an occasional appeal to his papa in these words,

‘What him says?’

Perhaps the glass of sherry had thawed Mr. Dufton’s cold calculation of Philip’s chances; for, when Sissy and her mamma had left the room, he admitted that, after all, a knowledge of London streets would not be difficult to learn.

‘You can always ask your way, *after the fare is inside*. You get him inside, and make sure of him; and then you can ask the nearest pleeceman.’

‘And how much do you give your drivers?’

‘I don’t pay them no salary,’ said he. ‘I lets ’em have the cabs for so much, and they make what they can get. Sometimes it ain’t much, if they have a bad day or night; and there’s some on ’em so slow in catchin’ the eye o’ people, that they miss hall their chances. And then there’s others as is always dawdlin’ in publics, and leavin’ the cab on the stand, and when fares come they take the next cab. That’s one

on 'em, just come into the yard there for his second oss. He's one of the few as have two osses a-day, and little he does wi' 'em—except at the stations early in the mornin'.'

'Well,' said Mr. Philip suddenly, 'let me have that cab for the rest of the day, that I may see how much I can get.'

'It ain't mine,' said Dufton; 'he's hired it.'

'Here is a couple of sovereigns you can give him for the loan of the cab.'

Dufton looked at Mr. Philip with some suspicion, and with a twinge of anger. Was a man applying for work likely to have sovereigns running loose in his pockets? And was the whole matter a joke?

'If this 'ere is a lark, Mr. Philip,' said he, looking at the two sovereigns, 'I think you might ha' spoken more plainly.'

'It is no lark,' said Philip. 'Do you wonder I should have money? A man need not be penniless because he wants to work. See—I will leave the two sovereigns with you to make what arrangement you

like; and you will let me have the cab from now until the evening.'

' You couldn't go out drivin' a cab in that ere coat and hat,' said Mr. Dufton with a smile.

' You can lend me both,' said Philip, as carelessly as if it were in the olden time of his ordering everybody about.

' They wouldn't half go on you.'

' Then the man who was driving the cab can lend me his—he is as tall as I am, I should think.'

So Mr. Dufton descended to the stables. It was not the first time he had obeyed the whims of a certain young gentleman.

In less than half an hour Mr. Philip was perched on the box of the hansom, rigged out in a sun-faded brown coat and a glazed billy-cock hat. When he drove out into Euston-road, he had an uneasy consciousness that he would laugh in the face of any one who might hail him; and rather hoped that nobody would. His speculations on that point were disturbed by the angry admonition of a policeman, who

wanted ‘none o’ that ere crawlin’;’ and so cabby had to touch up his horse and move on at a brisker rate.

‘Cab, sir?’ he said to an old gentleman who was standing at the corner of Albany-street.

He felt rather ashamed of making this white-haired old gentleman the subject of a joke; but, to his surprise, the clergyman—for such he was—nodded. Mr. Philip drew up by the kerb-stone. His fare got inside, and cabby opened the little port-hole by which prayers and supplications arise from those condemned to temporary punishment below. Mr. Philip inwardly trusted he should not have to drive to Islington—the part of London of which he knew least.

‘Eccleston-square,’ said the fare.

‘Right, sir,’ said the cabby, delighted to get an ‘easy one’ to begin with.

No accident befell them on their way; and at the prescribed number the passenger got out.

‘What is your fare?’ said the old gentleman mildly.

Here was a problem which neither Mr. Philip nor his employer the cab-proprietor had thought of; he knew only the fares for such distances as he had been accustomed to drive himself.

‘Leave it to you, sir,’ he said, touching his cap.

‘What is your fare, young man?’ repeated the clergyman severely.

‘I don’t know, sir. I suppose it is about three miles.’

‘I cannot remain in conversation with you on the pavement, as you ought to know. It is your business to inform me what I should pay you. If you do not care to do so, I will go inside.’

‘Then suppose you give me two shillings.’

‘I do not think the charge exorbitant,’ remarked the clergyman, tendering the half-crown.

‘Then you might give me another sixpence to drink your honour’s health,’ said Philip, touching his cap again.

‘I will encourage no such practice,’ re-

plied the clergyman, going up the steps to the house.

So the somewhat listless Rosinante between the cab-shafts was slightly admonished with the whip; and our hero set forth in quest of new adventures.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE BRINK.

THE more Arthur Drem saw of his friend Hickes, the better he understood how to manage him. Like most men of weak nature and confused perceptions, Hickes would trot peacefully and evenly along a well-known road, but would shy like a frightened horse if he saw anything new or startling in the way. Mr. Arthur had therefore to lead him up gently to such obstacles, show him there was nothing dangerous about them, and so coax him onward to the next stage. Whenever he looked forward to the climax of the journey, and spoke of it, Hickes recoiled from it in mingled dismay and derision; but when Mr. Arthur merely contemplated the immediate and practicable steps, with which both

were familiar, Hickes was content to do as he was bid.

This was very singular; for these steps were useless, and a cause of a great deal of unnecessary trouble, if the future climax were impossible. Mr. Arthur's object during this time was to keep his friend from looking forward altogether, and put his present action in the light of a harmless prank.

'After all,' he said, 'you can suffer no injury by becoming intimate with such a pretty girl as I hear she is.'

Mr. Arthur's faith in the practicability of his scheme had grown more assured with time. All his previous doubts were gone now. The Rotunda drama had at first only captured his imagination—now it took possession of his reason; and he had the most admirable belief in the processes of his own logic. At times, when Hickes would indulge in a little anticipation, even he caught a faint warmth of enthusiasm from the ardour of Arthur's convictions. He was only dissatisfied as to the means.

He did not believe in the drama. Yet an extraordinary difference in his manner was produced when he found himself in the second scene of the living comedy or tragedy which Mr. Arthur—at once his pupil and teacher—had so boldly sketched out. He had now become acquainted with Lilian Seaford; and he came down to Arthur's lodgings, radiant and triumphant, to announce the fact.

‘What did I tell you?’ said Arthur coolly. ‘Was there ever anything more easy and natural?’

When Hickes began to speak of the girl, and to describe her beauty, his somewhat expressionless eyes and face brightened up with a dull glow of admiration.

‘I told you that also,’ said the imper-
turbable Arthur.

‘But you have no idea how pretty she is,’ said Hickes; ‘nor would you have if I were merely to tell you what she is like. You must see her. I have often read what would pass as descriptions of her, you know —very dark blue eyes, a high white fore-

head, lots of hair of a sort of—sort of—sort of—'

Hickes waved his hand in the air, in default of words.

‘I know,’ said Arthur.

‘But all that tells you nothing.’

‘Not much,’ said Arthur.

‘Then her manner—to the children, especially. She was like a small mother to them; and she laughed once or twice at some absurdities of their answers, and I’m hanged if I didn’t wish I was in her class.’

‘That she might laugh at you?’

‘No; you mistake. There was nothing cruel in her laugh—it had the same sort of frankness that she used in speaking to you, quite frank and simple, you know; and apparently not caring to think what you thought she might be thinking of—’

‘Hickes, you must have gone straight to a public-house on coming out,’ said Arthur reprovingly.

‘I didn’t—I couldn’t. You may laugh as you like, but I declare that, when I left

that schoolroom, I wished I was a deal better fellow than I am, and I wished I could go back and tell her so; and when I came to think of you—'

‘Well, what did you think of me?’

‘That it was a confounded shame—’

‘What was a confounded shame?’

‘Why—you know. I was nearly throwing up the whole affair on the spot.’

‘Well, you are the most vacillating and illogical creature I ever met. You think you ought not to marry a girl because you find her pretty and pleasant in her manner. If she had been plain and a dragon, you would have seized the other excuse. But you have not told me how you became acquainted with her.’

‘Simplest thing in the world. I was to be merely a spectator this evening, as before; and so I went up to the place. I was rather before the hour; and while I was loitering about, in comes a young lady dressed in deep black, with a black veil over her face. Everybody crowds round her, and shakes hands with her, and she

is laughing and talking to them all at once. She lifts up her veil — I see a charming face and the prettiest pair of eyes—and then somebody calls her “Miss Seaford.”

‘Quite dramatic,’ observed Arthur. ‘You might put it in a play.’

‘*You* might; my clients wouldn’t stand anything so weak. No; I should have had her come on the stage from the top of a house on fire, or carried on in a fainting-fit, by me, her lover; or—’

‘Well, to continue.’

‘To continue. I hung about the various classes, while the performance was going on, by way of gaining experience. I sat down near her. She lent me a book, and told me where the lesson was.’

‘Of course you looked very modest and pious, very amiable and good-natured.’

‘You don’t believe in modesty, or piety, or anything else, but I do,’ retorted Hickes, whose vibratory nature had not yet shaken off the influences of the schoolroom and of Lilian’s unconscious kindness. ‘I tell you

frankly that I thought you and I were two confounded scoundrels.'

'Perhaps you are right,' said Arthur; 'but it is no matter. Go on.'

'I was very near telling her all about it.'

'She would have had you arrested as a dangerous lunatic.'

'But at the same time, I thought I might as well make her acquaintance, if I could. One does not often get the chance of speaking to such an amiable and nice-looking girl, I can tell you. And so I put the book, by accident, into my pocket, and forgot to go near her during the rest of the service.'

Across the rather vacuous face of the young man, which had been a few seconds before quite penitent and earnest in its expression, there came a brief smile at this stroke of cleverness.

'Then you overtook her on her way home, and gave it to her?' said Arthur.

'No, I did not. I kept behind her on her way home—she went the roundabout way by East Heath-road—until I saw her

knock at the door of the house. Then she entered. I went up immediately afterwards, and asked if I could see Miss Seaford for a moment. The maid-servant looked rather surprised; said that Miss Seaford had gone upstairs, and would I walk into the parlour.'

‘The fly inviting the spider. Well?’

‘Of course I went in. There an old gentleman, with white hair and rather a fierce look about his head, turned on me; and I wished that I was out of the house. I’d have given twenty pounds to be out of the house. Mind you, you may think it very good fun, but it was uncommon awkward to go like this into a bear’s den, and not have a word to say for yourself.’

‘Didn’t you say you had called with the Testament, or whatever it was?’

‘Certainly, I did; but not until I had stood in the middle of the floor, looking like an ass, with my throat choking. You say my experience in inventing awkward situations and getting out of them should prepare me for anything. That’s all very

well, while you're in your own house, with a pen in your hand; but when you're in another man's house, with him looking as if he was going to eat you, it's different—precious different. I'd rather have faced an alligator with jaws as long as Southend pier. Everything behind my eyes began to swim round, so that I could neither look in nor out for anything to say or do; and then, at last, I stammered and bungled and hoped that Miss Seaford would accept my excuses for my carelessness in carrying off her Bible from the Sunday-school. Sir, that word was my salvation. The enemy began to thaw. He said something about the school, and at this moment Miss Seaford entered the room, and, though she appeared a little amazed—as may have been natural under the circumstances—she was very gracious, you know, and accepted my apologies, and tried to make the thing rather pleasant. So did the old gentleman; for he asked me to sit down, and then he began to unfold his views on all sorts of religious points connected with

establishments, and what not. I was in a precious fog.'

'I daresay,' said Arthur.

'And so would you have been,' returned Hickes rather angrily. 'Who was to know what an Episcopalian was? I began to think that Henry VIII. had precious little to do to kick up such a dust; and that his eight wives—'

'Six,' said Arthur.

'Well, what's the difference, when you go in for a lot? I wish they had given him something else to do, as I say. Luckily the old gentleman had most of the talking to himself; and I had only to sit in a sort of mist, and hope he would ask no questions. Then Mrs. Lawson came into the room; and I was more afraid of her than of the other two. She has sharp eyes, that woman; and she looked at me from head to foot, until I began to feel quite weak and quaking along the back. Talk about an ordeal!—the Spanish Inquisition was nothing to this. All I could do to escape from that woman's eyes was to pretend to

be greatly interested in what the old gentleman was saying; and so I had councils, and popes, and Scotch Covenanters, and James II., and Arch-bishop Wolsey—'

‘Cardinal Wolsey, if you please.’

‘And Charles I., and Carlyle—I mean Cromwell—all dancing quadrilles within my head. And sometimes the quadrille was changed into a regular cracker of a waltz, round and round; and then, all of a sudden, I’d catch sight of Mrs. Lawson’s eyes, and these confounded gyrations inside my head would stop in a second, and I’d be wondering if she saw anything in the shape of my necktie to tell her that I knew you.’

‘Why, all this is splendid material for you,’ cried Arthur. ‘You are amassing experiences for future dramas.’

‘Rubbish! How could I put that into my dramas? Would you have the principal actor open his head on the stage to let people see what was inside?’

‘No; they would hiss the blankness of the show. But you ought to try something

different from merely rearranging these eight puppets you speak of?’

‘We will discuss that some other time,’ said Hickes, fortifying himself with another glass of Arthur’s claret, as if the present business he had in hand was sufficient worry to have before him. ‘I was going to tell you that my listening so meekly to Mr. Lawson had apparently produced a good impression on him. He wanted me to stay and have some supper with them; but as neither Miss Seaford nor Mrs. Lawson seconded the invitation—indeed, I will go the length of saying they looked a trifle surprised—I did not consider it prudent to remain. Old Lawson, however, said I might always come in there and rest when I was up in the neighbourhood; and so, thanking them all, I left and came down here.’

‘In excellent spirits,’ said Arthur, ‘over the discovery that your future bride is fairer even than you imagined.’

‘Ah,’ said Hickes moodily, ‘that’s another thing.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I mean,’ said Hickes, lazily stretching out his legs, and speaking in a determined tone, ‘that I have had enough of this thing. If it is only a lark, as you say, it has gone far enough. At least, it has gone far enough *for me*—you may carry it on, if you like.’

There was an interval of dead silence. Mr. Hickes looked at his boots; Mr. Arthur bent in two the penholder he had in his hand, to prevent himself flying out into a rage. It was not the first time his irresolute companion had suddenly assumed an air of resolution; but on this occasion he seemed more in earnest than he had ever been before. Mr. Arthur treated the matter with much apparent indifference; said it was of more importance to Hickes than himself; hinted that perhaps Hickes was right in considering their scheme impracticable; and finally changed the subject altogether, by proposing a game of chess.

The table and pieces were brought; and the game commenced. Hickes was at no time a brilliant player; but as he now

played, or pretended to play, the keen eyes of his opponent easily perceived that something other than the taking of pawns or the development of an attack on the white king was uppermost in the weak young man's mind. Indeed, Mr. Arthur was content to let this growing discontent increase, rather than again open the matter; and, as he expected, Hickes himself suddenly reverted to the subject of their previous talk.

‘The first steps, I grant you, were easy enough,’ he said, ‘quite easy. I admitted that from the beginning. But now we are at a dead stop.’

‘You can’t castle out of check,’ remarked Arthur, keeping his whole attention on the board before him.

‘I beg your pardon,’ said Hickes hastily, and shifting his king into the next square.

‘That square is commanded by my queen,’ observed Arthur.

‘Bah! of course!’ said Hickes impatiently, and then he managed to get out of his chess difficulty.

‘You were speaking of that affair with Miss Seaford?’ said Arthur carelessly. ‘Ah, well, perhaps it would be a risky matter. It is true that nothing could be more certain than the hold you would have over my uncle, if you succeeded. Every day he is becoming more wretched about Philip’s absence. He does not say so; but I know it; and I know that anybody who removed the cause might dictate his own terms.’

‘Confound it,’ said Hickes, ‘you are always dangling that before my eyes, as if you meant me to murder the girl. I’d very nearly do that as soon as the other thing you propose.’

‘Murdering her *would* smack a little too much of the Rotunda, wouldn’t it?’ said Mr. Arthur with a smile. ‘In the mean time may I inform you that a knight does not generally jump from a black square to a black, and that it is unusual to have both one’s bishops on the same colour?’

Hickes regarded with dismay the mess into which he had got his pieces, and gruffly withdrew from the table.

‘Let us sink this stupid game, and have a talk.’

‘I should have given you checkmate in two moves,’ observed Arthur, as if the game were of greater consequence.

‘I say we have come to a dead stop. I have become acquainted with the girl; I should like well enough to marry her—but where is the chance of such an impossible thing? You say she is engaged to marry your cousin. Perhaps she is married to him already. In any case, is it not absurd to think of carrying on this wild speculation any farther? As I say, we have come to a dead stop.’

‘You mean you have,’ said Arthur. ‘I have nothing to do with it—beyond giving you my advice as to a possible way of bettering yourself—of securing for yourself a pretty wife and a tolerable slice of fortune. As to the project having come to a dead stop, that is a matter of opinion. I do not see that it has.’

‘You don’t see that it has?’ exclaimed Hickes with a burst of anger. ‘Then you’re

either blind or mad, that's all! Why, what on earth would you do, if you were in my case ?'

' Rather, what would you do if the same problem confronted you in a drama ?'

' In a drama ! ' repeated Hickes with bitter irony. ' I would kill your cousin, perhaps. Or I would carry off Miss Seaford by force. Or I would make her swear an oath to marry me—'

' Then why not make her swear an oath to marry you ?'

' Because she wouldn't be such a fool,' said Hickes contemptuously.

' Would she appear a fool in the drama ?'

' Well, no. Because I could get her into a predicament, and frighten the life out of her, and extract the oath from her.'

' Why not do all that up at Hampstead ? ' said Arthur, looking with cold careless eyes upon his companion.

Hickes stared in silence.

' Don't look at me as if I were the devil,' said Arthur.

‘I believe you are,’ returned the other, jumping from his chair, and beginning to pace up and down the room.

Arthur sat still, apparently quite indifferent to what was going on; and yet keeping an eye on the strange alterations of expression which crossed Hickes’s face. At one moment he would be serious in look, with his breath going rapidly and his finger twitching a button nervously; then the next minute he would throw his hands out, and laugh derisively, as if dismissing the phantom project that had arisen before him. When he finally stopped before Arthur, there was an excited flush on his usually dull face; but he still had a sceptical smile on his lips.

‘It is a capital notion,’ he said, ‘for a drama. But suppose I were to corner that girl, as you suggest—suppose I were to frighten her into swearing she would marry me—do you know what the result would be?’

‘Yes,’ said Arthur; ‘she would marry you.’

‘Quite the reverse,’ said Hickes with a scornful laugh. ‘The old gentleman who talks about the Covenanters would come down and punch my head; that would be the result.’

‘What then? Suppose he did punch your head; that wouldn’t matter much if she married you all the same.’

‘She wouldn’t do anything of the kind.’

‘She would keep her oath.’

‘She wouldn’t be such an uncommon ass.’

‘There you mistake. An oath has probably no sanctity for you; but such an oath as you *might* dictate to a girl brought up as she has been she would keep, though it involved the sacrifice of her life.’

‘Perhaps,’ said Hickes dubiously. ‘But that only shifts back the impossibility another step; because, if she would keep such an oath, rather than swear it she would sacrifice her life.’

‘You needn’t threaten *her* life in order to get her to take the oath,’ said Arthur. ‘You would have more chance in threaten-

ing to destroy your own, if she did not consent. Don't you see ?'

' I see a good situation for the Rotunda,' said Hickes, sinking helplessly into a chair ; ' nothing more.'

The extreme excitement and agitation which the conjuring up of this vision had produced suddenly left him ; and with the reaction he had become mentally quite limp and flaccid. He asked for another cigar, anxious to get something trifling and immediate to do. When he held up the taper to light it, Arthur noticed that his companion's hands were white and trembling nervously, even to the shaking of the cigar.

' What is the betting on Bluebeard for the next Derby ?' said Arthur ; and he was himself startled—not so much by the odd irrelevancy of the remark as by the sound of his voice.

Hickes sat silent for several minutes ; and then he roused himself with a violent effort.

' I'll tell you what it is,' he said. ' I

believe I should grow mad if I had that idea you mentioned always before my mind ; mad enough, at least, to go on with it and venture everything for it. I once heard it said that a man would grow mad if he kept thinking about what some people say—that the world never had a beginning ; and that the mystery would possess him so that he would be certain to commit suicide in the hope of discovering the truth.'

'If he did not discover the world's beginning,' said Arthur, with a rather ghastly effort to be jocular, 'he would at least discover his own end. But I never knew such a despondent fellow as you are—talking about murder and death and suicide when you are looking forward to marrying a charming girl and enjoying yourself with a lot of money ! You should be thinking of your wedding-trip rather—down to Herne Bay, let us say; or will you cross the water? Newly-married people shouldn't start off for Paris just directly they are turned out of the clergyman's hands, because the bride is likely to have all her notions of the heroism

of her husband destroyed by watching him becoming a helpless and ignominious lump as soon as the vessel begins to pitch; and I don't think *she* is likely to be any the prettier if she gets sea-green, and asks faintly to be taken downstairs. Better look at the waves, Hickes, my boy, from the solid earth of Herne Bay. Can she sing, do you know? I picture to myself she and you living in a cottage, window open; you smoking on the sofa, she playing the piano; both of you as happy as two pigeons. And when one of you gets up, and goes to a table, and opens a desk, I know whom you are going to write to; it is to Arthur Drem, Esq., Mincing-lane, London, E.C.; and you say you will be happy to see him down on the following Friday with his "Friday-till-Monday bag" with him. And you think he won't be jolly glad to go?"

Hickes looked up as if he had heard nothing, with a dazed look in his eyes.

"I think," he said slowly, "if I were to become fond of that woman, and if she were to look me in the face and tell me

that I had destroyed the happiness of her life, I would shoot myself.'

'More suicide!' said Arthur gaily. 'You are mistaking your vocation in life, Hickes. Tragedy is not your line. You excel in drama; and you might in comedy, only there is not an audience for genteel comedy at the Rotunda. As to your getting fond of Miss Seaford, no doubt you will. You spoke of her with quite the rapture of a lover when you came in to-night. How could you live in the same house with her without becoming fond of her? And as for her reproaching you—and I honestly admit that she may be a little angry at first—she will see in time that everything has happened for the best, and for the especial good of them she cares most about. Bear that in mind, Hickes. Cheer up, lad! None but the brave deserve the fair!'

Hickes said nothing, and in a few minutes left the house. When he had got outside he paused, and vaguely looked up and down the silent street, with its lines of gas-lamps. The sky was dark overhead, and

there was a high wind blowing. Although the night was warm, he trembled slightly; and as he walked away he buttoned his coat around him, as if to assure himself that it was only the wind that made him shiver.

CHAPTER VIII.

TEMPERAT ORA FRENIS.

WE left Mr. Philip in Eccleston-square. When he turned his horse round, he had no very clear idea as to what he should do next, or as to the most likely place for touting in the neighbourhood. He was divided between the wish to make as much money as he could that afternoon, and really see whether he could compete with professional cabmen, and with a vague desire to have the fun of driving through the haunts most familiar to him, and looking at the people he knew. By and by the great ebb and flow of carriages would begin in the Park; and he only regretted that he could not, in his present disguise, join the stream.

As he was turning the corner of Gilling-

ham-street, he observed a man standing at the door of a house with a large picture-frame in his hand. He drove down that way, and was immediately hailed. The small brown-faced bearded gentleman, having put the picture carefully into the cab, told Mr. Philip to drive to New Bond-street.

Just as he was getting into the vehicle, a small crowd that had gathered on the pavement appeared to be shaken with laughter over something remarkably interesting that was happening in its midst; and both Mr. Philip and the artist stopped to have a look. The crowd consisted of a lot of big hulking idle fellows, who had been attracted to the show from Vauxhall-bridge-road. There was much cheering and howling; and presently the circle of dingy ragamuffins moved into the road, in front of Mr. Philip's horse. The cause of the excitement was now visible: two very small boys had been provoked into fighting, and the men were goading them into farther display of their science. Neither of the children

was above eight years of age; and one of them had his face covered with blood; while the method of their fighting was to catch each other by the hair, and tug and struggle until both fell into the road, whereupon the men would pick up the bewildered infants, set them on their legs, and urge them to renew the fight.

‘Disgusting brutes!’ cried the man with the frame.

Now, on the right of Mr. Philip’s horse, there were three men who were particularly active in the matter; and these three men, happening to stand in a row, displayed three grossly fat and bare necks above their greasy coat-collars. The opportunity was too tempting. Across that line of dirty human flesh the thong of a cabman’s whip came suddenly down; while an appalling yell, rising simultaneously from the three men, startled the crowd into forgetting the children altogether. A splendid uproar ensued; for the sufferers, smarting with rage and pain, called on their fellows, and made a dash at the cab and the cabman. There

was but one way of escape. With a sharp touch to the horse's neck Mr. Philip sent the animal straight in among them, scattering them on each side, and knocking down at least one. He just managed to get clear of the two small boys, and then he sent the horse forward. A man was hanging on behind, and trying to get up into the box. Him he easily disposed of with a decisive tap from the butt of his whip on the top of his cap. The last that Mr. Philip saw was a stone going through the window of a shop near the corner—a weapon which had doubtless been aimed at himself. Then, looking down through the trap-door in the roof of the cab to see if his fare was all right, he caught a glimpse of the little brown man rubbing his hands with delight, and grinning all over his face with ferocious glee.

‘My good fellow,’ said the artist, when they arrived in Bond-street, ‘your fare is eighteenpence, I suppose. Here is half-a-crown for you. The yell from those ruffians was magnificent—magnificent—worth five

shillings, in fact, if I could afford to give it you.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Philip, touching his hat. 'Glad they didn't overtake us, or they'd have been down on that ere picture o' yours.'

While he was thus speaking to the artist, and receiving the half-crown, he became aware that two ladies were looking at him. When the picture had been got out, and he was now ready to receive fresh commands, he turned to these two ladies. One of them was Mrs. Drem, the other Miss Kingscote; and both were regarding him with horror and dismay.

'O, Philip!' said Mrs. Drem, coming forward to him, with her face quite pale, 'what do you mean by this? It is too cruel of you—too cruel! Why did you not tell your father, rather than threaten him in this way?'

'You mistake altogether,' said Philip from his box; 'it is no threat at all. I am only trying whether I can earn myself a living this way, and what sort of one. I

had no idea in the world of meeting you; and, to tell you the truth, I can't stop here talking to you under two shillings an hour.'

'I will give you two shillings—twenty pounds—anything—if you will only come down, and come home and change those dreadful clothes you have got on. Do you know that Mary Thormanby and Captain Dering are in the silversmith's shop over there?'

'Getting the wedding-ring, I hope,' said Philip.

'If they come out and see you, they will publish your disgrace over the whole world.'

'I don't mind if they do, if only they pay me for the copyright. What disgrace is in it? But, you know, I can't stop talking to you.'

For indeed a policeman came along at this moment, and stared at the cabman who was having a conversation with two fine ladies.

'My fare is three shillings, mum, neither more nor less, mum,' remarked Mr. Philip.

‘O, what shall I do?’ said the timid little Mrs. Drem to her companion.

Violet Kingscote had been standing somewhat demurely on the pavement, with the suggestion of a laugh in her bright dark eyes, but still hoping that her father’s coachman—seated on the box of Sir James’s brougham, a few yards farther down the street—might not recognise Mr. Philip.

‘If you like,’ said Violet, ‘I will send Richards and the carriage home, and Philip can drive us somewhere where you can talk with him.’

‘O, thank you, darling, if you will be so kind!’ said Mrs. Drem effusively; and this course was immediately adopted. Richards thought his young mistress was mad; but he received her commands as gravely as though he had been ordered to drive to his own funeral. As Mrs. Drem and Miss Violet got into the cab, and as Mr. Philip again woke up his industrious but rather languid horse, Mary Thormanby came out of the shop opposite.

Philip had but one glance at the figure and face he knew so well. It would be affectation to say that he did not suffer some quick fluttering or spasm of the heart in catching sight once more of the pale fascinating face, and the eyes that had at one time held his own future in them. He used to try to read there what was in store for him, as if they were a book inscribed with the decrees of destiny. And now another man—for there was the patient and heavy Captain just behind her—was reading the same book, and tracing out in its mystic characters a special revelation to himself. You can never get a man to believe that the language he finds in the eyes of the woman he loves is a language common to the whole race of mankind—that it is as simple as a big A B C—and that one man can read it as easily as another.

Fortunately she did not see him. Mrs. Delaney, who was also of the party, called the attention of her niece to some article in the silversmith's shop; and so the gray eyes were turned in another direction. Mr.

Philip drove on, not regretfully, yet rather saddened by the recollection of old times which her unexpected appearance had called up.

‘Where shall I drive to?’ he asked through the small trap-door.

‘Anywhere,’ said Miss Violet.

‘I warn you,’ he said, ‘that you will have to pay handsomely for this conversation. You should consider whether it is likely to be worth the money.’

‘My dear,’ said Mrs. Drem, ‘I don’t care if it is fifty pounds. I am only anxious to save you from this disgrace.’

He drove up to the west side of Regent’s-park, and there paused in a deserted nook.

‘You may have the glass down, and speak to me through the trap, if you would rather not be seen,’ observed Mr. Philip.

They decided on getting out, however; and so Mr. Philip got down from his box. Mrs. Drem was very much agitated; but Violet, looking at his costume, could not help laughing.

‘You must have employed an artist, Philip,’ she said, ‘to paint everything in the proper colour. But he has forgotten your hands: they are far too white for a cabman.’

‘You should be ashamed of yourself, miss,’ said he gravely, ‘to go about in your silks and your satins, and laugh at the clothes of people poorer than yourself. A poor but honest man is above such sarcasm, which is unbecoming to a sweet young lady, and she not out of her teens. And I’ll drink your good health, miss, if you’ll be so kind—’

‘Here is something for you, my dear man,’ she said, picking a sixpence out of her pocket; ‘but I thought poor and honest people never drank anybody’s health.’

‘But this is distressing,’ broke in Mrs. Drem with a piteous expression of face. ‘It is no joke, Violet; and you, Philip, should not encourage her. What would all London say, if the story were to be told to-morrow? What would all your friends say, Philip—how could you ever

meet them again? Think of the men at your club.'

'Indeed, it's true, ma'am,' he remarked. 'I shouldn't be standin' here a-talkin' to you, when I've a job to get the shilling saved every week for my club. And I hope, ma'am, that I shall be moral, and not drink that ere goose before it's paid for; for what should I do at Christmas without the goose and the bottle of rum, and only a shilling a week, although it's not more than five on us out o' thirty subscribers as ever sees it? My fare is eighteenpence, ma'am, and six-pence for waitin'.'

'Philip, your father—'

'I hope the old gentleman is very well, ma'am.'

'Philip!' she began again; and then she broke out into a vexed and angry laugh, and turned away. 'I leave him to you, Violet—I give him up.'

Whereupon Miss Violet assumed an air of responsibility, and said,

'Once for all, Philip, you do not mean to become a cabman, do you?'

‘Certainly not,’ said he, ‘if I can find anything more lucrative to do. But employment is not very plentiful in London; and I am anxious, above all things, not to starve. The life of a cabman does not seem to me unpleasant, in weather such as this; but I am willing to give up its freedom and picturesqueness for more solid advantages. In the mean time, my dear Violet, I am making an experiment to see how much one may get this way; and you are disturbing the conditions of the experiment.’

‘Philip, why won’t you come home?’ said Mrs. Drem suddenly.

‘Why won’t I go home?’ he repeated in some surprise, as if that alternative had long ago passed from consideration.

‘Your father is wretched about this affair—thinks over it from morning till night. I am sure, so anxious is he that you should return, that he would recall anything he may have said to you in haste and anger. I am sure he would. I have no doubt he expected, when you left the house, that you would soon find discom-

fort and anxiety, and be glad to return. Now that he sees such is not the case, his only thought is to get you back on any terms.'

'On any terms!' said Philip, opening his eyes.

'Well,' said Mrs. Drem, drawing back somewhat, 'you must be reasonable too. You have to consider—' and here she glanced somewhat anxiously at Violet. Why was she unwilling to speak before her of the real reason of Philip's withdrawal from the house?—why, but that the well-meaning little woman had been thinking over a wonderful plan for rectifying all these wrong things, in which Violet was to play a chief part?

Such was the truth. Mrs. Drem found all the people around her at sixes and sevens—the whole condition of affairs disturbed—and she proposed to come in as general mediator and pacifier. It was no selfish wish to secure her own comfort (although that was also involved) which prompted her to undertake the thankless

task ; it was merely that she saw before her a grand opportunity of doing everybody a service. The timid hypocritical little woman felt almost heroic as she contemplated the prospect ; and one of the pet portions of her scheme—that on which she dwelt most lovingly—was to get Philip to marry Violet Kingscote.

There was nothing improbable in all this, Mrs. Drem reasoned with herself. Both Violet and Philip had the sincerest esteem and liking for each other ; and nothing could be more opportune and pleasing to both their families than their marriage. She suspected that Violet was a little too well-disposed towards Lord Cecil Sidmouth ; but then, thought Mrs. Drem, was the grave pragmatical young man, who had no money, and who was always propounding puzzles about metaphysics and scowling at one, to be compared with her Philip ? Philip himself would have to give up this absurd phantasy that had taken possession of him. Mrs. Drem's own experience of life had not taught her much

respect for the importance of the affections. She did not believe in grand passions. Young people got cured of these whims, at the bidding of prudence; and she did not believe it possible that this monstrous rupture of domestic relations could be permanent. Of course Philip would come back; of course Violet would throw over the red-headed young man with the eye-glass. There would be universal reconciliation and forgiveness; and, on the wedding morning, Mrs. Drem pictured to herself Violet Kingscote's tightly-brushed dark hair being surmounted by the folds of a veil, and the fastening of these folds would be pearls, and the giver of them Richard Drem's wife.

It was partly this project, that had grown dear to her through much thinking of it, which induced her to make such a constant companion of Miss Kingscote; and during their shopping, and their drives in the Park, and what not, Mrs. Drem was continually endeavouring, by little hints and remarks, to make light of Philip's se-

cession. She explained to Violet that young men were rather fond of those wild flirtations ; but they came to nothing. It was only the opposition to their wishes, she observed, that gave the pastime some zest ; and when the temporary excitement was over, the youthful heroes returned from their campaigns, and settled down into domestic quietude.

‘ You know, my dear,’ she remarked with a smile, ‘ it is hard to say whether men or women flirt most ; but men like to carry on these meaningless love-affairs to a greater length. Girls prefer to sit in a room, and amuse themselves by playing hide-and-seek behind a fan ; but men want to look big and grand, and have their love-affairs bold and picturesque. Don’t you think so, Violet ? Don’t you think they are no worse than we are—or as you are, I should say, for my youth had not much of that in it ? And so, you see, you must not place too much importance on anything of the kind. It is only in books that the nice young lady, who has never

looked at a gentleman, marries a husband who has never thought of flirting with anybody before. You are too sensible to think of such a thing.'

Violet was a sensible young person, as Mrs. Drem said, and had in her own way about as much shrewdness and knowledge of the world as her mentor. She not only perceived that Mrs. Drem was preaching at her, but she knew also the whole story of Philip's adventure. Miss Violet did not think it necessary to tell Mrs. Drem that she had so far been Philip's confidante. She had got rather to like this well-meaning and kindly little woman; and even sympathised with her unselfish wishes touching Philip, his father, and herself. Violet did not think it likely she would marry Philip; but she sensibly thought there was no use in robbing Mrs. Drem of the pleasure of anticipation by stating her reasons. And, if the truth must be told, Violet Kingscote honestly reflected that, although she did not particularly wish to marry Philip, still such a marriage would have its compensa-

tions; and it was therefore no disagreeable subject of talk.

‘When Philip marries,’ she said one day to Mrs. Drem, ‘what will his wife say about Mary Thormanby?’

‘My darling,’ exclaimed Mrs. Drem with a surprised look, ‘you don’t expect to marry a man who has never before shaken hands with a woman!’

‘I was not talking about myself, Mrs. Drem,’ said Violet with a gentle laugh; and Mrs. Drem’s pale little face flushed.

Up here therefore, by Regent’s Park, Mrs. Drem found herself in a dilemma; for she did not wish to let Violet see the gravity of the situation. She had been treating the rupture between Philip and his father as a very awkward circumstance, but still one that could easily be mended by a little forbearance on both sides. She was unwilling to mention the name of Lilian Seaford.

‘I have considered,’ said Philip, in reply to her hesitating suggestion, ‘and I am afraid that to talk of my going home is out of the

question—you know why. But do not let that distress you. I promise never again to make you uncomfortable by driving up Bond-street while you are in it.'

'Promise me,' said Mrs. Drem pleadingly, 'that you will at once give up any intention you may have had of—of—'

'Becoming a cabman? I never had such an intention; but I give it up, to please you. I shall assume my ordinary costume this evening. If I were subject to such interruptions as these, how could I make my living by cab-driving?'

'And you will let us know, Philip,' said Violet earnestly, 'how we can assist you.'

'But I don't want assistance, my dear child; though I am very much obliged to you. Don't you see what trusting to assistance would really mean? Shall I put it into plain English for you?—for, in these days, a beggar does not live on alms—he is supported by voluntary contributions. Now, my case is simply this—'

'Philip,' said Mrs. Drem angrily, 'I will not have you call yourself a beggar.'

‘I was just going to prove that I wasn’t one,’ he replied with a laugh; and then he moved towards the cab.

‘Will you ladies step in? You are only wasting time here—though it is very kind of you, I am sure. Believe me, that I shall not starve. Keep your tender and anxious minds quite at rest on the point.’

‘Are you still at the same address, Philip?’ asked Mrs. Drem.

‘Yes,’ said he; ‘and I can see in your eyes that you mean to send me a big cheque. I won’t have it.’

‘My dear boy,’ she said, almost in tears, ‘you will starve—I know you will starve! And while we are living with every comfort, you will be toiling and slaving in poverty, with scarcely a crust of bread. I cannot bear the thought of it, Philip. Why should you do this? Why should you encounter such fearful trials—hunger, want, anxiety? There is nothing in the world to repay you for such a terrible life.’

‘Thank God, there is!’ he said; and there was a look in his eyes which she had

never seen there in the old languid days. ‘Don’t let us have any heroics in this dull neighbourhood,’ he added. ‘Get into the cab, please. Shall I drive you down to Park-lane?’

‘Not for worlds!’ cried Mrs. Drem. ‘Think of the servants, Philip! We will walk—I am sure we can, Violet.’

‘Yes,’ said Violet dubiously.

‘And indeed you will do nothing of the kind,’ said Philip with perfect decision. ‘I will drop you, if you like, at the foot of Edgeware-road; but I shall not allow you to walk from here to Park-lane.’

Somewhat disconsolately, Mrs. Drem got into the cab, and Miss Violet followed. Philip drove them down to Edgeware-road; and there they got out and went away, quite forgetting to pay the cabman. Mr. Philip would have asked for his fair wages, but that he was busily engaged in watching the movements of Lord Cecil, who, with his hat considerably on the back of his head, was walking absently along towards the corner of the Lane. Would he meet the

two ladies? Mr. Philip hoped not; for he wished to have the pleasure of accosting his friend from the box of a hansom. Unfortunately, however, Miss Kingscote and her companion passed so close to Lord Cecil, that he was obliged to see them; and he immediately turned to walk down to Mr. Drem's house with them.

Mr. Philip followed at a distance; but was disappointed at seeing Lord Cecil, yielding to an apparently urgent invitation, enter the house. So he turned away.

By this time, it must be confessed, he was rather tired of his perch, and had become hungry besides. His effort at calculating what he would be likely to earn as a cabman had been spoiled by this interruption: and the final result of his deliberations was that he let down the glass of the hansom, and drove straight up to the stables. He was, on the whole, very glad to get into his own clothes again; and it was with a rather vague promise about seeing them again that he bade good-bye to Mr. and Mrs. Dufton, to the saucy Sissy, and the

manly little Henry. Master Henry happened at the moment to be in great depression of spirits, through an accident which had happened to a couple of recently-born kittens.

‘ Us did not have the two kittens in the yard,’ he explained; ‘ and they weren’t been cleaned this morning, and nurse did take them, and her put them in the pail what is in the yard, to wash themselves, and the stupid kittens didn’t wash themselves, they went and drownded themselves.’

As he was leaving, Mr. Dufton insisted on returning to Philip two of the four half-sovereigns which he had got for the loan of the cab; and Philip, bidding farewell to the chubby small boy who was in grief about the kittens, consoled him with one of the half-sovereigns. It was not until he was outside that he suddenly recollected how unwarrantable was this piece of extravagance in his present circumstances. Half-sovereigns were of consequence now.

He partly made up for this folly by dining for a shilling in a dingy restaurant,

and went on foot all the way home to Paddington. As he had also to contemplate walking from there up to Hampstead, farther on in the evening, the walking home was a creditable sacrifice. He saved three-pence by it, and felt himself entitled to a modest share of self-congratulation. It was true that he had thrown away about thirty shillings that day in an idle and useless fashion; but then he had saved half a-crown by eating a bad dinner, and three-pence by walking from Euston-road to Paddington.

Late at night Lord Cecil Sidmouth called up at his lodgings, and found Mr. Philip returned from Hampstead. Lord Cecil was in evening dress, having just come from dining at the house of a Cabinet Minister; but there was no after-dinner gaiety about the young gentleman's manner. Indeed, he was more than usually important and grave; for, during the previous two hours, he had been propounding his theories of the relations that ought to exist between England and her colonies; and the affairs of the empire still hung heavily over him.

‘ Philip,’ he said with the sternness of a mute at a funeral, ‘ if you have nothing to do at present, and if you will take up a light occupation, why not become secretary to the Analytical? The post is vacant. We will give you 150*l.* a year.’

Here Lord Cecil fumbled with his loosely-gloved fingers in his waistcoat-pocket, and, scowling more than ever, said,

‘ In the mean time I wish you would take that.’

Mr. Philip opened the bit of paper which Lord Cecil, rather nervously, had put on the table. It was a cheque for 100*l.*, drawn on a bank in St. James’s-street, and signed ‘ Cecil Sidmouth.’

‘ My dear fellow,’ said Philip, ‘ don’t think me impertinent; but when did you ever have as big a balance at ——’s?’

‘ Never you mind.’

‘ Let me ask you one question: if I were to present this cheque to-morrow morning, the moment the bank opened, would it be paid?’

‘ There is no need for such hurry,’ re-

joined Lord Cecil, rather uncomfortably twisting the cord of his eye-glass. ‘If you present it during the forenoon, you may be sure it will be all right.’

‘One question more, Cecil. Who put you up to this? Who gave you the money, in short? Mrs. Drem?’

‘No.’

‘Violet Kingscote?’

‘Confound you, what business is it of yours!’ cried Lord Cecil angrily, and all the more vexed to see Mr. Philip quietly fold up the slip of paper and push it towards him across the table.

CHAPTER IX.

HICKES WINS.

A DULL October day was drawing to a close, and over Highgate and Hampstead there lay the sultry haze of the afternoon sun-light. All the morning—it was a Sunday morning—had been gray and dismal; now there was a bronze-coloured glow in the west, and the spire of Highgate church caught a tinge of the warm light. It was a drowsy silent afternoon, fit for quiet talk, and nothing else.

‘We may have thunder,’ said Jims.

‘Why must you go to that perpetual school?’ asked Philip of Lilian. ‘Suppose you should be caught in a thunderstorm on your way home?’

‘Dinna mind him, my girl,’ said Jims severely. ‘Do your duty, in spite o’ thun-

derstorms. He has persuaded you to enough o' self-indulgence by takin' ye every Sabbath mornin' to that play-actin' church to listen to music, and look at pictures pented on the windows.'

For Mr. Philip had stepped in to relieve Lilian from going to the somewhat dreary chapel which Jims and his wife frequented. Lilian, he knew, was an unwilling convert. She was familiar with the Church-of-England service; she liked sweet music; she even preferred stained-glass windows to whitewashed walls. And so Philip, despite Jims's opposition and sarcasm and argument, carried her off each Sunday morning to church, and together they sat in a small pew, and listened vaguely to what was going on, and watched the sun shine through the colour in the windows, and dreamt dreams of all that was coming to them in life. If all this was, as Jims insisted, but a pampering of the eyes and ears—but a feeble, sensuous, emotional sort of worship, as contrasted with the vigorous denunciations and the rough argument which he himself pre-

ferred—it was not very harmful. It suited the ease and quiet of those still and peaceful autumn days.

Lilian would go to the Sunday-school this evening, thunderstorm or no thunderstorm ; and so Philip accompanied her thither.

‘What time shall I come for you ?’ he asked.

‘Don’t come at all, Philip,’ she said. ‘The children are to be addressed by a missionary just come home from China ; and it is rather uncertain when we may get away. You need not be alarmed about my safety,’ she added with a smile. ‘There are always one or two of the teachers going down that way.’

A young man passed them and entered the school. As he did so, he took off his hat and bowed to Lilian.

‘I hope that is not one of them,’ said Philip, laughing. ‘He is either tipsy or a maniac.’

‘O no, Philip,’ she said, ‘that is Mr. Hickes, who has become so friendly with

Mr. Lawson of late. He is a very pleasant and modest young man, and very obliging.'

'He has an odd appearance, at least,' said Philip. 'He stared at you then as if you were a ghost, and his own face was rather ghost-like. Good-bye, darling. Tell little Carry Jepps that I shall bring her the pocket-knife for her brother next Sunday.'

He waited until she had gone inside, and then he hurried away into the dusk. A slight wind had sprung up, however, and there was a mild damp freshness in the air which had not been perceptible during the day.

'This does not look like thunder,' he said, looking northward, where Highgate was now only a blue mass in the deepening gray. Red lights were beginning to burn in the windows of the houses around him, and here and there overhead there was dimly visible a single star. He returned to Jims Lawson's house, and resolved to wait for Lilian's return.

Meanwhile the young monitress had

begun her duties of the schoolroom. By this time Mr. Hickes had been accommodated with a small band of pupils; and it was generally remarked that he showed great industry in being very well-informed about the particular lesson of the evening. He had got into great favour with most of the teachers; and towards Lilian, in especial, he was never tired of showing a wish to do her small kindnesses and services, which were offered so modestly that they could not well be refused. On one or two occasions, also, he had spoken to her while out-of-doors, and had walked part of the way with her. Indeed, his manner was so kind and respectful at all times, that it disarmed suspicion; and Mr. Hickes had become quite a favourite with Mr. Miall and his young friends.

On this particular evening there was something restless and *distrait* about the new teacher. His face was paler than usual, and his general bearing was far from having its ordinary placidity and calm. He was not well at ease; his eyes

were rather blood-shot; and he was evidently labouring under some excitement which disturbed the customary quiet of his demeanour.

‘I fear you are not well,’ said Mr. Miall to him, kindly putting his hand on his shoulder. ‘Shall I relieve you from your duties?’

‘Not at all! not at all!’ said Hickes quickly. ‘I never was better in my life.’

Mr. Miall left him, thinking that the new teacher had probably received some intelligence that day which had unnerved him, although he did not like to reveal the cause of his perturbation. The scholars, however, with the observant eyes of children, wondered not a little at the abrupt sentences, the absent look, and the general disquiet which their teacher evinced. Occasionally he seemed to forget altogether that his class was there, and subsided into an odd sort of reverie. At other times he asked ridiculous questions, and made remarks which were quite foreign to the lesson in hand. There was, too, a certain

unusual look in his face and eyes which did not escape the children's notice.

When the ordinary lessons were over, the teachers came together in a little crowd, and then sat down on one of the benches to hear the address of the Chinese missionary. At such times Hickes had been in the habit of getting near to Miss Seaford, as being the one of his companions whom he knew best; but now he seemed to keep away from her as much as possible. He glanced at her once or twice; but hastily withdrew his eyes, and kept them fixed on the floor. When the missionary had finished his brief address, Hickes rose with a violent start, as if he had just been awakened.

In leaving the schoolroom, Lilian was one of the last, and Hickes was standing at the door when she got outside. He moved aside to let her pass, and did not even bid her good-night, as was his custom. She was rather surprised by this want of courtesy, and hoped she had not offended him in any way. She did not speak, however, but put down her veil over her face and set off

homeward, going round by East Heath-road, as was her wont.

The night was quite still now and clear. The slight wind had carried away the mist, and then died down itself, leaving the stars overhead to throb in a cloudless, transparent, and dark sky. There was no rustling in the trees, so still and silent was the night; and the only sign of life or motion abroad was the tremor of the innumerable white stars in the great dark vault. But when Lilian had got round to the Heath, she was surprised to see, once or twice, the flash of a pale blue shaft of lightning up in the direction of Highgate—a sudden, vivid, pallid line of light, that flickered for an instant and then disappeared, followed by no distant rumble of thunder. There was something strange and weird about these blue shafts, that played silently about the horizon in the deep stillness.

She was looking northward at these frequent glimmerings of the lightning, and rather hastening her walk, when she was accosted from behind. The suddenness

with which her name was pronounced startled her, and she inadvertently paused and turned. It was only Mr. Hickes, who begged her pardon for interrupting her, and hoped she would allow him to see her home. There was something in his voice which struck upon her ear with a peculiar ring; and she could only hasten to say that there was no need, that she was near the house, and that—

Here Hickes came closer to her, and she now fancied there was some truth in what Philip had said. She was not actually alarmed, and yet she would rather have been two or three hundred yards nearer James Lawson's door.

‘Do let me go with you,’ he pleaded in that forced voice which jarred on her ear. ‘The night is so dark: you ought to have gone the other way. And indeed, Miss Seaford, I want to speak with you for a few minutes, if you will be good enough to let me.’

‘To speak with me!’ she said in great surprise, and endeavouring to hasten her

steps a little. She heard the sound of people walking farther down the road, and hoped she might be able to overtake them.

‘Yes, Miss Seaford,’ said Hickes; ‘you have been very kind to me since I have had the pleasure of knowing you—very kind; and now I ask you to add to your kindness by letting me walk home with you, and speak with you on the way. It is a trifle—a trifle, is it not?’

She fancied that he tried to smile; but the unnatural and husky tones of his voice showed that he was labouring under some powerful emotion or excitement which he was trying to repress. She gradually became more alarmed; and she was on the point of breaking away from him, and desiring him not to follow her, when he suddenly confronted her in the road, and seized her hand. She now saw that his face was quite white and wild, and the hand that he closed over her fingers trembled violently. She tried to draw away her hand—she was powerless; and indeed

at this moment a sense of danger, and a terrible consciousness of her own loneliness and weakness, came upon her so suddenly as wholly to unnerve her. She was stunned, frightened, confronted by a man who had the appearance of a madman ; and she felt herself helpless.

‘ Listen to me, Miss Seaford,’ he said, or rather gasped. ‘ Don’t be alarmed ; don’t tremble so. I’d sooner kill myself than harm you—you know that. There is no danger—none at all. How do you think I could harm you when you know I worship the ground you walk on? Listen! I would give you my life if it would please you. I think I have gone mad with love for you ; and I will kill myself if you don’t become my wife. Life to me without you is not worth having.’

‘ O, let me go! let me go!’ she cried, terrified by his wild manner. ‘ Some other time you may tell me—I wish to go home—I wish to go home by myself.’

‘ You must forgive me,’ he said, with a desperate effort at self-control, ‘ if I say

you must hear me out now. I cannot have you go away thinking I have been violent with you, and without knowing what has made me speak like this. God knows, I may be mad, but it is through love for you; and you know whether I have ever been anything than respectful to you since ever I knew you. You *must* hear me.'

'Another time,' she murmured.

'No—now!' he replied; and here again a strong shiver of excitement passed over him, and he struggled for utterance. The man was not acting. He had dwelt upon this interview until his part in it had assumed a morbid reality in his mind. He had almost got to believe that he was madly in love with the girl, through the fierce desire that had been stirred in him to be successful and win her for his wife. At first he had shrunk from the project with aversion and distrust; but, once in the act of carrying it out, he seemed to have lost self-consciousness and to have become the victim of a mania. There were conflicting passions raging in his mind,

about the reality of which no doubt was possible. Fear as to the terrible consequences which might ensue from this wild scheme if he failed in it—the lust for the money which was now almost within his grasp, and even a stubborn kind of pride that made him dread the ridicule of defeat—all these worked upon his feeble and impressionable nature until they produced in him a kind of delirium. For the time being he was really a monomaniac. He forgot all the set speeches he had prepared; and abjured this girl to have pity on his life, as if he really were mad for love of her. Frightened beyond the power of recovery, she listened to his ravings, and could not help believing them. Was there not plenty of testimony to the reality of his excitement in the haggard face and eyes and the shivering frame?

Escape from him was impossible; he held her arm with the grasp of a maniac, while he poured forth his protestations and entreaties. The footsteps in the distance became more indistinct; and she was too

much terrified to listen for others. All around them was the ghastly stillness of the night and the stars, while ever and again a pale line of blue light would flicker silently along the northern sky, and then disappear into the void. If Philip would but come!

‘You *must* listen—for what I have to say concerns the life of one of us. I cannot live without you; I will not live without you. If my case were not so desperate, I would tell you how kind I could be to you—I would win you over into taking pity on me—I would show you how you will do the greatest kindness [to Mr. Drem by letting him go back to his friends. Don’t you know that you have ruined his life if you marry him?—don’t you know that you will be my murderer? I swear before God I will not live to see you his wife.’

‘O, you terrify me!’ she cried pitifully. ‘You cannot mean what you say. I have done you no harm—pray let me go!’

‘You only care for your own safety!’ he said bitterly. ‘You have no thought what this night may do to me. Miss Seaford, I beg you to believe that I have come to a grave decision. I am not speaking to you out of any hasty impulse. I have tried to go away from you—never to see you again—long before I became incapable of controlling myself; but now that is impossible. There is but one alternative. As I tell you, you are ruining the man whom you wish to marry. You have estranged him from all his friends; you have thrust him into poverty. I tell you that you will not have been married to him a year when he will bitterly regret that he ever saw you; I tell you he will look on you as the cause of his worst misfortunes, and hate you and curse you!’

‘Ah, don’t say that!’ she cried. ‘You do not know what you say! If I have caused you pain—or if I must cause you pain—I am deeply sorry; but I cannot help it. I never sought to harm you. Mr. Hickes, won’t you let me go? I can-

not do what you ask; you will think better of it—you will forget.'

‘Forget!’

He came so close to her that she was forced to look up into his face, and she saw that it was ghastly pale, and that perspiration stood on it. His breath came quick and hard; his teeth were set; he was in appearance like one possessed. And yet when he spoke, it was with a cold implacable resolution in the tones of his voice that startled her even more than his vehemence.

‘Forget!’ he said calmly, and he still held her hand tight. ‘Do you know where forgetfulness is to be found? In the grave. You have chosen for me. I will bid you good-bye now. You may go.’

He released her, and stepped back. The next moment she saw before his breast the glitter of steel. With a faint cry, she sprang forward and caught his arm.

‘O, this is dreadful!’ she cried in an agony of terror. ‘What can you mean?’

‘I told you there was forgetfulness in

the grave,' he said in a low clear voice, 'and I mean to find it. As sure as there is a God above us, unless you swear, on the ground where you stand, to marry me, you will have for your companion a murdered man—murdered by you. I do not ask you to choose. You have chosen.'

'No, no!' she cried. 'Only wait till to-morrow—give me time—I cannot see you kill yourself—only till to-morrow! Have mercy upon me. I cannot, cannot do it.'

She sank at his feet, shuddering, and holding up her hands. All things seemed to whirl round her, and there was only a murmur in her ears. And yet the murmur seemed to say, 'Not to-morrow, but now—this minute. You are not prepared!' And then she vaguely knew, in her agony, that he was holding up her right hand, and that she was repeating the words of an oath, every one of which seemed to be written in fire and blood on the utter blackness of the night. Then a sinking backward, and a sweet dull unconsciousness of pain.

He was kneeling down over the prostrate figure of the girl, endeavouring to bring back the life to her by chafing her hands. Large drops of perspiration stood on his forehead, and his brain throbbed as if it were surcharged with blood. At last, being terrified, he called to her; and she roused herself, and awoke with a cry of terror on meeting his face near her.

‘You are not hurt?’ he said.

‘O, have pity on me, and go away!’ she cried; and she looked round with a shudder. ‘I wish to be alone—I wish to go back by myself.’

‘But you know you have sworn—’

‘I know, I know!’ she cried wildly. ‘O my God, what have I done?’

‘It will be all for the best,’ he said soothingly. ‘You will forgive me when you come to see what made me do it. I knew you would not marry me otherwise—and I could not live without you. I hoped—I knew—you would have compassion on me. O Miss Seaford, I feel that I am a wretch and a coward to have treated

you so; but I couldn't help it—I couldn't help it. And I will make it up to you—I will !'

She did not seem to hear him. She stood dazed and bewildered, with a pale white face and tearless eyes, as if she had not yet realised to herself the horror of what had occurred. Was it true, then, that these few minutes had destroyed her life, and that the cold stars overhead were as they had been when she left the school-room door? But a few minutes had passed, and what was this that had happened? There was a pain across her forehead, and a mistiness about her thoughts. She only knew that Philip awaited her at home, and that she dared not go to meet him.

She turned away, trembled, and was forced to take Hickes's proffered arm to prevent her sinking to the ground. Then, suddenly, she broke from him with a sharp cry, as if her heart had at length found utterance.

‘O Philip, Philip! was I not right in saying we should never be married? And

how can I tell you, my darling—how can I tell you, and look into your face, and say good-bye!"

She burst into tears, and went away by herself, weeping. Hickes dared not speak to her then. He watched her figure go down the road, and he followed her at some little distance, with a terrible weight at his heart. The excitement was all gone now; he had wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and his eyes did not throb and burn as they had done. The subsidence of the mania that had taken possession of him left him full of vague apprehensions, with a low dull sense of remorse and a strange susceptibility to physical cold. He shivered now, not with excitement, but with the chillness of the air. The stars above him glittered as if in a frost, and the silent flashes of the lightning were steel-cold and bright. His very teeth began to chatter, and then he recollected that he had a flask of brandy in his pocket. He took it out, and drank every drop of the burning liquor; and yet it did

not give him the desired warmth. The night seemed so cold.

And meanwhile the young girl had paused at the railings in front of James Lawson's small garden, as if she could not enter. She looked up at the windows —there was a ruddy glow in them. Presently the door was opened, and the figure of a man came out towards the garden-gate. Hickes saw the man approach the girl; she turned her face up towards his; a few words were spoken hurriedly, and then Lilian Seaford went into the house by herself, leaving the other standing by the gate.

Hickes turned and passed up the East Heath-road again. He went round through Hampstead, and then, having gone into a public-house and drank some more brandy, he proceeded to make his way towards Arthur Drem's lodgings.

CHAPTER X.

MORE BITTER THAN DEATH.

‘WHY does not Lilian come home?’ said Philip that evening, as he sat and turned over a few photographs that he had given her during their happy sojourn in the south. They were precious talismans those tiny pictures of the places they had visited; for now that there was but small chance of their being able to leave the din and smoke of London for the sweet air and the pure colour of Devonshire, Lilian would often sit with one of these views in her hand, and dream herself back into the beautiful solitudes of her youth. There was the wooded picturesqueness of Anstey’s Cove —the white shingle below, the bold rocks falling sheer into the green water; and in the distance the far glimmering of the Dorsetshire coast. There was Babbicombe Bay,

with its cliffs of red sandstone; and the Livermead rocks; and the white beach of Goodrington; and the fishing-fleet of Brixham. But, above all others, she had a view of Torquay, which was inseparably associated in her mind with one beautiful evening which she well remembered. She would sit and gaze at this poor little photograph until it was transfigured; until the bit of pasteboard faded wholly away—the horizon widened, and she saw in a dream the colours of that rare evening—a glow of pure pale pink over the clouds in the west—the tall heights of Waldon Hill growing transparently blue underneath this clear flame—low down in the south, the white crescent of the moon in the cold green of the twilight—and over the bay, and far into the east, a pale metallic light fading out on the mystic sea.

‘I must go and meet her,’ said Philip at length.

‘I’m thinking,’ said Jims, going to the window, ‘that I saw something like lightning.’

‘I hope not,’ said Philip anxiously, following him to the window.

They had not remained there above a second, when one of the pale steel-blue shafts glimmered across the northern sky. There was no thunder; only a harmless flash of light, which was presently repeated.

‘That is very often only the precursor of a serious storm,’ said Philip. ‘Mrs. Lawson, please give me a cloak or two, and I will go up to the schoolroom. That China fellow ought to have more sense than to keep a lot of children and young folks so late.’

‘Indeed, Mr. Philip, you’re quite right,’ said Mrs. Lawson indignantly; ‘and I’m sure I dinna like the look o’ him, missionary or no missionary. A big, heavy-cheekit, greasy, fat, thick-neckit, idle sump—’

‘Peace, woman!’ said Jims severely. ‘Ye should have mair respect for men that imperil their life in spreading the Gospel; and what has his neck, or his checks, to do wi’ his doctrine?’

‘A good deal,’ said Philip, looking about for an umbrella. ‘A man with a neck like that would imagine that heaven is peopled with Rubens’s women instead of angels.—But pray give me those cloaks at once, Mrs. Lawson—we will settle that missionary’s hash when we return.’

Mrs. Lawson was very proud to hear Mr. Philip pick up her Scotch phrases.

‘We will take him down to the Analytical,’ continued Mr. Philip, folding up a big shawl, ‘and have him dissected. We have a man who is just on the point of discovering how the brain acts in thinking. We will open the missionary’s skull—the formation will be nice and loose—we shall have the same chance that a botanist has of watching movements in the large cells of very flabby vegetables. The missionary will be of great service to us, I daresay; so we shall not abuse him farther. If Lilian comes down the other road, tell her I shall return in a few minutes.’

He put the shawls over his arm and went out, shutting the door behind him.

The night was dark ; but the starlight was sufficient to show him the figure of a woman who was apparently standing outside the garden, in the road, regarding the house. He advanced a few steps ; and by this time the dark figure had opened the gate and come down the path.

‘Lilian,’ he said, ‘what is the matter with you?’

She had run forward to him, and taken his hand in both of hers, while she looked back up the road with terror on her white face. She could not speak ; but he knew that she was trembling violently, and that her appearance was strange and wild.

‘Lilian,’ he said, ‘what do you mean?’

She only clung the closer to him, and grasped his hand tight ; and then she turned her face up to his, and said, with a terrible calm in her voice,

‘Philip, do you know that it has all come true at last ? I knew we should never be married. I knew it, when I asked you to come with me to Devonshire, that we might have a pleasant dream there—some-

thing that we could remember with kindness, if we were never to see each other any more. And now, Philip, it has come true; and you and I are never to be married, and we are to forget all we have been thinking about, and we are to go away from each other for ever. You do not seem to hear—you do not seem to understand me, Philip. Don't you hear what I say—that you are to go away—that I am speaking to you now—O, my love, my love!—for the last time?

What could it all mean—her wild manner, the tears streaming down her cheeks?

‘Lilian, are you mad?’ he cried; and he caught her to him, and smoothed back the hair from her forehead, and looked into the beautiful eyes that were full of fear and despair and pain. All at once she shrank from him, almost in terror, and released herself.

‘I shall go mad, if you do not go away,’ she said; ‘I cannot bear to see you, Philip! See—I will kiss you this once, and then you will go away.’

‘My darling,’ he cried, ‘what has happened to you? Come into the house and tell me.’

‘I must tell you here,’ she said in an excited way; ‘not before all of them. O Philip, don’t be angry with me; I am far more wretched than you can be. I have sworn a terrible oath not to marry you; to marry—’

She could not pronounce the name; she only glanced with a shudder up the dark road.

‘I have sworn it, Philip; and there is no going back—no going back! O my darling, how well I have loved you!—and now you must go away, Philip, for it will break my heart to see you. Do not come into the house. Your face is white, my dear; but you are not angry with me—you never were angry with me? Look, I will give you this one kiss, and it will tell you that my heart will always be full of love for you—always, always—but you must not see me again. God bless you, Philip—you have been very, very good to me!’

She had fled into the house, and he was standing, bewildered, under the stars, that seemed to be throbbing blood-red. A gulf had suddenly opened before him, in front of his feet; and, as he shrank back with horror, he knew that his eyes were growing dim, and that he must fall. A strong instinct of self-preservation took hold of him; he would rouse himself from this dreadful sleep, and prove to himself that the danger was only a dream. It already seemed to him that the apparition of Lilian—the wild words she had uttered—the frantic grief visible in her face—must all have been phantasmal; and yet it was true he had come out to meet her—it was true that the door of the house stood open before him.

He entered the house, and went into the parlour which he had recently left. James Lawson sat there, alone.

‘Where is she?’ cried Philip. ‘Haven’t you seen her?—didn’t she come in just now?—has she not returned at all?’

‘Do you mean Lilian?’ said the old man,

looking up from his book with some surprise.

‘Yes! Hasn’t she come in?’

‘You look as if you’d seen a ghost. I’m thinking I heard her come in, for the gude-wife went upstairs wi’ somebody.—But what has happened?’ said Jims, turning to his wife, who now entered the room, with a most unusual excitement in her manner.

‘O, this is dreadful!’ she cried; and then she looked at Philip almost with alarm.

‘Go on,’ said he; ‘tell us all you know about it.’

‘That young man Hickes—’

‘Hickes!’ ejaculated Philip—with all the vague wrath in his heart suddenly directed towards one object.

‘Has done what he should be hanged for. It seems he was determined to marry our Lilian, and he met her to-night up the road there, and frightened her into swearing that she would be his wife.’

‘Hickes will answer to me for all this,’ said Philip, with his face set hard and pale. ‘But as for the oath, Mrs. Lawson—as for

the oath—surely you had enough sense to tell her that it was nothing—pure nonsense! What value is it? Why, you must go and tell her not to disturb herself about it; an oath got under such intimidation is worth nothing. If a man threatens to blow your brains out if you don't swear not to reveal that he has broken into your house, there is nothing binding in the oath.'

'But he did not threaten to kill her,' said Mrs. Lawson, wringing her hands in her perplexity and dismay. 'He only threatened to kill himself—he says he is so deeply in love wi' her. It's a terrible misfortune, Mr. Philip, terrible!'

'But you don't mean to say that you consider she must keep her oath!' he said, not so much in anger as in dismay. 'You don't mean to say that you will allow her to marry him?'

Even as he uttered the words a terrible crowd of recollections came hurrying into his mind—of Lilian's inflexible resolution where her sense of right was concerned, and of the possible results of her recent training.

He remembered how in past times he had come to regard the abnormal sense of duty which sometimes governs the noblest women as a hideous kind of idol set up in a fair and white sanctuary exacting the cruellest sacrifices. Was this fetish now to destroy the life of the young girl in whose happiness all his happiness was centred ?

‘I canna think o’t ! I canna believe it yet !’ cried Mrs. Lawson in despair. ‘And yet what is she to do ? She must answer for her oath at the judgment-seat. It is no the first time I have heard o’ sic a thing. I mind o’ a lass that was in service in Kirkintilloch being frichtened into marryin’ an auld man o’ fifty, because he was aye swearin’ he would murder either himsel’ or her. And there’s mair nor ane lass I’ve kenned, that was half coaxed and half frichtened into marryin’ young men they didna much care for, through some such threat. O, it’s a dreadfu’ thing, that love-making, when it gets into a man’s head, and mak’s a madman o’ him. The newspapers are fu’ o’ cases o’ murdering and wounding ; and if

Lilian hadn't sworn as she was bid, whakens but there would have been a man's corpse lying up the road there?"

'Better a good deal that the corpse should be there,' said Philip fiercely, 'than that her life should be ruined. And, indeed, if there is no other way out of it—'

He did not give expression to the thought that rose within him then, and caused his dark face to grow darker. But if ever there was murder in his heart, it was at that moment; and it seemed to him, in his passion and despair, that the blackness of the crime grew lighter, as he thought of the suffering girl upstairs, and that her sorrow lent a sort of consecration to it.

'Mr. Philip,' said Jims gravely and sadly, 'this may be a severe trial to you, and to all of us; but we are bound to guard against the grief and disappointment provoking us into sin or sinful imaginings. Do not give way to your anger, however just ye may think it: it may be that this is a merciful dispensation—'

'I will have none of such merciful dis-

pensations !' exclaimed the younger man, with a vehemence that startled them. ' I tell you that you have no right to let evil and wrong take its course, and then say it is a merciful dispensation. If this is a work of Providence, it is time we were taking our affairs into our own hand. I will not believe it. I will not believe that either she or I should submit to such a monstrous thing, though she had sworn a thousand oaths on her mother's grave ; and I tell you that, sooner than see her sacrificed to this man—sooner than let such a horrible crime be enacted in the very face of heaven—by God, I will kill him with my own hand ! If this is your religion and your law of right and wrong, I have done with both. I tell you, you should pitch your petty code of justice into the fire ; and get up some other tables of the moral law, and put at the head of them that the first act of virtue in a man is to kill, as he would kill a reptile, a ruffian who would debase and ruin the life of an innocent woman.'

' Philip,' said James Lawson, with an

anxious sadness in his eyes, ‘there is worse might befall you than what has already happened. God grant that may not come also.’

‘Go upstairs and tell Lilian that she is not to fret—that she will not be the victim of such a monstrous theory,’ said Philip to Mrs. Lawson.

‘Indeed, I will go up and comfort the poor girl as well as I can,’ she said. ‘It is comfort and consolation, not revenge, which she needs.’

‘I will bring her consolation before twenty-four hours have passed,’ said Philip, with his teeth set. ‘Tell me where Hickes lives.’

‘I will not,’ said Mrs. Lawson firmly; and then she suddenly caught the young man’s arm, and cried, with tears springing into her eyes, ‘O Mr. Philip, it is not at such a time that you and we should fall out. Do not be vexed with us if we dinna see these things as you see them. Think o’ the puir lassie upstairs.’

‘I do think of her,’ said Philip; ‘and

it is for her sake that I deny your right to impose your notions of right and wrong upon her. I say it is shameful you should think for a moment that such an oath—whatever its terms—should be regarded. It is monstrous, incredible that you should think so.'

'Mr. Philip,' said Mrs. Lawson, 'we have advised her in nothing—it is of her own will that she swore she would marry him; it is she who must answer at the last day for the keeping of her oath; and it is for herself to say whether she will dare to break it.'

'It is not for her to say,' said Philip; 'it is for you—you who are older than she is—who ought to advise her in her distress, and help her. Instead of that, you leave her to herself, and to her own frightened notions of what she ought to do; you let your superstitions come in to blunt your own sense of what is right, and leave her to her fate. This is what you call your conscience, I suppose?'

'Mr. Philip,' said James Lawson, 'I can

make great allowance for you in your present position ; but there are some things I will allow no man to say in my house. It has been your boast that you were drawn towards this girl by the great purity and nobleness of her nature — by her strong sense of honour and truth and honesty — by that very delicacy of conscience you are bitter against. I ask you, whether you would rather see such a woman be true to herself and her sworn word, than debase herself and purchase her present happiness by laying in store for herself unending remorse. It is hard, hard to bear ; but it is better she should bear it than forswear herself, and live with a crime on the whiteness o' her nature. If I were a young man, I should be proud to know that I had been the friend o' a woman capable of keeping her solemn oath at the expense of her present happiness. I would not, whatever it might cost myself, ask to see this noble woman debase herself to live a life of ease and comfort.'

‘ Why, these are the morbid dreams of

a priest, not the sentiments of a man,' said Philip, with angry disdain.

'When a year or two have passed,' said the old man, 'you will think differently. You will know that there is nothing rarer, nothing more beautiful in life, than to see a tender-hearted woman content to suffer hardships rather than fall away from her own ideal of honour. It is so rare a thing, Philip! The present trial will be bad enough for both of you, God knows. And yet people have borne worse, and have grown the stronger and wiser and better for it. The young do not see the purification that sorrow brings until they have passed through it, and look back; and then they know the joy of having remained faithful in trial. You may think I am heartless in speaking in this fashion, yet I have come through as hard trials as fall to the lot o' most men; and now I can scarcely regret them.'

'And think,' added Mrs. Lawson, 'o' this other young man, who was near killing himself this very night. Doubtless it was a cruel thing to do—to compel our

poor Lilian to marry him; and yet he was desperate. He was so gentle and quiet every time he was here, that something must have driven him near mad. She says that, if she were to break her oath, he would make away wi' himsel', and you and she would ha' a stain o' blood on your married life.'

He looked at them both with a vague kind of fear. Lilian had been under their teaching so long—would she now have her natural and extreme sensitiveness of conscience exaggerated and rendered implacable by their counsels? And was there not, on their part, some sort of notion that they had been wrong in allowing him to cut himself off from his friends for the sake of this friendless girl—an error which could now be rectified?

‘I see you have both decided against me,’ he said bitterly, ‘and you are the keepers of her conscience. My only chance is with herself. I must see her.—Mrs. Lawson, will you kindly say to her that I wish to speak with her for a few minutes?’

‘She will not come down,’ said Mrs. Lawson. ‘She heard you coming in; and bade me tell her when you had left.’

‘I must see her!’ said Philip.

Mrs. Lawson, knowing what would be the result of her mission, went upstairs, and opened the door of Lilian’s room. The girl was seated on a chair in front of the bed, her head buried in the pillow. When she lifted her head, Mrs. Lawson could see by the dim candle-light that there were tears on her face, and that she held in her clasped hands a small prayer-book that Philip had given her.

‘He wants to see you,’ said Mrs. Lawson gently.

‘My poor boy,’ said Lilian, with a wistful sad look in her eyes. ‘He must not see me—how could either of us bear it? I shall be able to bear it better than he, for I have all along been prepared for the sorrow of parting with him. He never would believe me—he was always so full of hope and confidence.’

She went forward to her kindly old

friend, and said, with her head bent down and in a low voice,

‘Is he very much grieved?’

‘He is more angry than grieved, my poor girl,’ said Mrs. Lawson; ‘for he does not believe it possible yet. O, I hope nothing more dreadfu’ than we dare think o’ will come o’ this!’

‘What do you mean, Mrs. Lawson?’ said the girl, but in a tone which said that nothing worse could happen now.

‘He is so angry at the way you have been treated—so determined that you will not marry the other—that I know he has it in his heart to murder him.’

‘O no, no!’ cried the girl, covering her face with her hands; ‘there has been enough of wickedness and wrong done already. Tell my poor Philip that he must not mind about me; he must go away abroad for a time—away from London altogether, and forget all we had been thinking about. He will soon forget, will he not, Mrs. Lawson? He is young and strong; all the world is before him; he

will go abroad, and see people and places; and when he comes back to London'—here there was a sad uncertain smile on the girl's face, as she looked up—‘he will not remember the poor Miss Lil, who was such a trouble to him long ago. You know he will go to his friends now; he will get plenty of money, and then he will go away, and come back with no sorrow on his face at all. And if ever he remembers me, it will be perhaps when he finds himself down near Tor Bay, where—where we were so very happy!'

She could add no more. She turned away, and threw herself on the bed, and sobbed bitterly there. Mrs. Lawson went over to her side, and gently drew away one of her hands.

‘My darling,’ she said, ‘you must come downstairs, instead of sitting here and crying by yourself. Will you come down now?’

‘Not while he is there,’ she said. ‘Tell him, Mrs. Lawson, to be kind to me even now, at the last moment, and not ask me to

see him. I could not say good-bye again. See, give him this, and tell him all that I told you about his going abroad.'

She turned to her writing-desk, which stood on the small table beside the candle. She opened the little ivory-boarded prayer-book; on the fly-leaf were these words: '*From Philip, to the little girl who is always wasting her books with pressed flowers.*' Her eyes were blinded with tears, and her hand trembled, so that it was with a pitiable effort that she wrote underneath: '*And who gives it him back, with her whole heart's love, and bids him good-bye, and knows he will be brave and hopeful for her sake.*'

'There,' she said to Mrs. Lawson, 'give him that, and bid him good-bye for me. There are some flowers in the leaves; perhaps—perhaps he will remember having gathered them for me one evening by the side of the Dart.'

This was the last message he received from her. He looked at the little volume he knew so well, and he saw here and there a withered scrap of some wild-flower that

he had picked up and given her. All his anger seemed to have gone from him. He held the book tightly in his hand, said good-night to Mr. and Mrs. Lawson in an absent way, and went out into the cold night.

By and by they got Lilian downstairs. She was much calmer, the sadness in her eyes having grown far more intense and still. She told James Lawson, in her simple way, all that had ever occurred between Hickes and herself at the Sunday-school. It was very trifling and unimportant, as we know. The only occasions on which Hickes had really had an opportunity of speaking to her in a friendly way were those chance visits he had paid to James Lawson himself; and then he had been so singularly gentle and unassuming, that no one could have dreamed of this sudden outburst.

‘But it will be so much better for Philip,’ said Lilian, gazing wistfully into the fire. ‘He will go back to his own people; he will no longer have to trouble himself

about money; he will forget all about me.'

'There are some things a man cannot forget,' said the old man. 'He will never forget you so long as he lives; and your brief friendship with him will have a pure influence over his life so long as he has memory. He will never forget you, Lilian; and whatever happens to you, you will have to show yourself a courageous and a noble-minded woman, that you may be worthy of his best thoughts of you.'

'And if he does remember me,' she said, 'I hope it will not be in connection with this terrible evening. He must think of me as he knew me in Devonshire. Do you remember, Mr. Lawson, that I said he and I should never again see Tor Bay together? And you were so angry with him for spending that money in going with us. Was it not better now that he went? To him, perhaps, it will not matter so much; he will go back to his friends; and this cruel thing—and it will be as hard for him as for me—will be far better for him in the

end. Men have so much to do, so much to think about, that old memories are not of so great importance to them. But I should feel myself far more wretched now if I could not look back to that happy time. It was all a dream—I knew it was a dream—and yet it was so very beautiful! Do you remember the bright mornings, and the sound of the blue water outside, and how far away the ships seemed to be? Do you remember the day we left Torquay, and sailed round the coast, and went up the Dart? That was the end of the dream, you know. I think it wanted only one thing—that, just at the end, I could have lain down and died, and freed Philip from all the care he has had about me.'

Then she said presently, in the same low voice,

‘Perhaps he will marry Miss Thormanby. He must not think it will please me that he should marry no one.’

‘My poor girl!’ said Mrs. Lawson, with tears coming into her eyes, ‘you are always thinking about every one but yourself; it

is you who ought to be pitied. You need not think of Mr. Philip marrying any one—for many a long day, at least. I have never seen a man so fond of a woman as he has been of you.'

'And he will not wish that he had never seen me,' she said; 'for we have been very happy together. He cannot regret having known me, I think, when he remembers that time in Devonshire. Perhaps, when he next goes there, he will be married, and he will tell his wife about me—that I was very fond of him; but that was a long time ago, and she need not be angry with me. I don't think she would be angry if she knew me, and knew my story, and knew that I bore her no ill-will.'

And so the sad and gentle creature talked on, half forgetting her sorrow in thinking of him and his future. But when they were about to retire, she said to Mrs. Lawson:

'Would you mind sleeping in my room to-night, Mrs. Lawson? I—I am afraid—'

'Of what?' said Mrs. Lawson.

‘Only,’ said the girl, pressing her hand over her heart, ‘that I have a great pain and weight here. Don’t they say that people sometimes die so suddenly of heart-disease that they cannot even say a word to their friends?’

‘My darling!’ cried the old woman, ‘you must not talk like that.’

She slept in her room, nevertheless. The girl was somewhat restless and feverish all night; but towards morning she sank into a soft sleep. The old woman, looking by the pale light at the beautiful face that lay on the pillow, with the soft golden-brown hair lying in small curls and coils down on the white neck, saw a smile occasionally cross the girl’s lips, and heard her murmur in her sleep. And when she caught a word or two, she knew that it was about the sea that the girl was dreaming; and once she caught the name of Philip, and then some mention of the river Dart.

CHAPTER XI.

TWO THOUSAND DUCATS.

‘All the brandy in London won’t make me drunk to-night,’ said Hickes gloomily, as he sat in Arthur Drem’s lodgings.

‘Why should you wish to be drunk?’ said Arthur. ‘You have been successful—you have come home triumphant—you ought to be as gay as possible.’

‘Yes,’ said Hickes with a sneer, ‘we have been victorious, haven’t we, over a girl! I like to see two men sitting down to congratulate themselves over having frightened a girl! Hang me,’ he added with a sudden burst of anger, ‘if I don’t think we two ought to be drowned like rats. I will back out of this; I won’t go any farther. How ever I managed it I don’t know, for I can scarcely remember what I

did. I was as mad as any man ever was ; and I'll swear the girl was not half so much frightened as I was. Confound it, Drem, why don't you make that fire burn ?

He shivered as he spoke, and rubbed his hands together.

‘ I begin to see what I have done,’ he continued in quite another tone ; ‘ I did not know at the time. I think I was bewitched by her pretty face, or else frightened into madness ; for I know I spoke as if I meant to kill myself for love of her, and she believes it. By George, if she would only marry me, I’d make up to her for all this—I would indeed.’

‘ And why not ?’ said Arthur.

‘ Why not ? Do you think she is such a fool as to keep her oath ? Do you think they would let her ?’

‘ My dear friend,’ said Arthur calmly, ‘ you are committing your old mistake of judging what other people would do by what you would do yourself. Of course, *you* wouldn’t keep such an oath—or any oath that was distasteful to you. You have

no more idea of the way in which such people as they regard an oath than you have of the dramatic incidents that befall people of violent temper and great wealth, who give the rein to their whims. This girl, from all I can hear, has the nature and the will of a Puritan ; and she has been recently under the hands of a couple of rigid Presbyterians. You cannot understand such people, or realise to yourself what they would do for the sake of their conscience. You judge of human nature by the experiences of one man—who is rather poor, who leads a tame and monotonous life, who has no great passion, and no great belief about the sanctity of an oath. I tell you the girl will marry you. Of course, it mustn't be done in an abrupt way—so as to make the ceremony look like the buying up of her pledge—like a sacrifice, you know. No ; you must go up and see her ; win over her friends to liking you ; pretend it was only the suggestion of an impulse that led you to exact this promise ; and, in short, make the fulfilment of her

oath as pleasant to her as possible. If you were to go up as the villain of a play, and demand her hand in lieu of her oath, she would probably kill herself first. But she believes you are desperately in love with her; she believes that you have a gentle and kindly nature (I don't think she is far wrong, you know); and so, as I tell you, she will marry you.'

'If she does, I will make it up to her,' said Hickes eagerly; 'I will indeed. You couldn't help being fond of such a charming face, could you? I have never seen any woman who could come near her in appearance; and then her voice—you wish she would always go on speaking, so soft and pleasant it is. I'll tell you what, Drem—I'm knocked this side and that, every time I think about what I should do. It does seem a beastly shame to make her marry me, and I make up my mind to cut it altogether; and then, again, when you think of herself, it seems as hard to give her up. And then this money. I declare I wouldn't have gone to Hampstead this

evening—I would never have spoken to her again—but for the Rotunda people losing that play which they were to have copied. They won't pay a farthing for it; and now they're going to run one of Dolent's plays, and that may carry them on to the pantomime, which is good till February. Do you really think your uncle will give me the money?’

‘Of course he will,’ said Arthur, ‘and be precious glad, too.’

‘Mind you, Dreim, I'm not as bad as I seem. I declare to you, I would marry the girl without any money, if I had the chance, and if she was willing. But then, without the temptation of this money, I should feel bound to set her free.’

‘You are a victim of compulsory vacillation,’ said Arthur, laughing. ‘And as you seem to have no will of your own, you had better be guided by me.’

‘If your uncle were to refuse to have anything to do with the affair, I wonder what I should do,’ said Hickes absently. ‘I should be inclined to marry her, and in-

clined as well to set her free, because, after all, it's such hard lines for the girl.'

'You are only getting into a fog,' said Arthur impatiently, 'by guessing at the right and wrong of the thing. The facts of the case are simple enough. Here are you, very fond of a remarkably handsome girl; you get her to swear to marry you, and she does so. There is nothing wonderful in it; it occurs constantly. Only, as it happens that the marriage is, at the same time, very convenient to another man, there is no reason why he should not make you a present—a wedding-present, as it were.'

'And that *is* the sensible way of looking at it,' said Hickes boldly, and sitting up in the chair. 'And I might explain to any one what I have done; and how could they blame me?'

This conversation with Arthur Drem gave Hickes far more courage than any brandy could have done. He went home to his own place in Sloane-street, thinking there were much worse men in the world

than he ; that, indeed, he had done nothing that he had not a right to do.

‘Isn’t universal competition the first law of existence ?’ he said to himself. ‘Isn’t everybody trying to better himself at the expense of other people ? Generosity and forbearance, and all that sort of thing, is only possible to people who have plenty of money, and can afford it. If I had plenty of money, I would be generous. If I could afford to deal fairly, I would deal fairly. Make me an emperor, and I’d astonish the world with my goodness—I’d encourage the arts, and give money to beggars, and go about visiting the needy, and be a general favourite. But at present, I’m in the ranks of those that are fighting for their bread. I have as good a right to mine as anybody else ; and if anybody else suffers, well, I’m sorry, but it isn’t my fault. It is *not* my fault ; and if everything were known, perhaps I’m quite as good as my neighbours.’

With this comfortable theory he got to sleep ; and next day he went into the City to learn the results of Arthur Drem’s medi-

ation with Philip's father. While Hickes waited in an obscure coffee-house, in a thoroughfare leading out of Cornhill, Arthur was deliberating as to the chances of his finding Richard Drem in an approachable mood.

At last he ventured upstairs. Mr. Drem was fast asleep when he tapped at the door and entered; he started up with a look of anger which did not bode well for Arthur's chances.

'I wished to speak to you, sir,' said Arthur gently, while he shut the door behind him, 'about a matter not entirely relating to business.'

'You want money, do you?' said Richard Drem. 'Got into debt, I suppose. The best thing for young men who have got into debt is to let them get out of it for themselves.'

'It was not about myself, it was about Philip, I wished to speak to you.'

'Very well,' said the uncle sharply. 'Go on, go on. What have you to say? Do you want money for him?'

‘No,’ said Arthur.

‘I thought not,’ said Richard Drem, with an open sneer. ‘There is this one good thing about you, Arthur—you don’t waste your time in thinking about other people.’

‘He intends marrying that young—that young person,’ said Arthur, too well used to taunts to mind them; ‘and I am sure, sir, you will be as glad as I am to meet with any means of preventing such a calamity. I am deeply sorry for my unhappy cousin, sir, since he has been so unfortunate as to earn your displeasure. I should like to see him restored to his family.’

‘Yes, yes, yes!’ said Mr. Drem hastily. ‘We know your generous intentions and sentiments. Let us pass that over. What is the means you propose to take in order to get Philip back? Do you mean to marry the girl yourself?’

It was a difficult thing for Arthur to withstand the insolently mocking tone in which his uncle spoke; but he had an admirable command over his temper.

‘ You may well disbelieve the possibility of such a thing, sir ; and yet I know a man who may, if he chooses, marry Miss Seaford. He is not in wealthy circumstances—’

‘ And you want me to say how much I will give him if he will marry her ?’

‘ Well, sir, some recognition—’

‘ How much do you propose to get for yourself ?’

‘ You mistake my motives altogether, sir, if you regard them as mercenary in such a matter as this. I wish to save Philip from committing a blunder which will ruin his life. I wish to do you a service also ; and here, as I say, is the chance of making his marriage with Miss Seaford impossible. After that, of course, Philip will return to your house. Who can doubt it ? He has plenty of common sense ; he knows the advantages of a comfortable home and an easy income. That I don’t ask anything for myself should show you that what I say is true, and that I am not trying to impose on you.’

‘ Will you kindly tell me whether you

are drunk, or whether you really believe what you say?' observed the merchant contemptuously.

'I do believe it—I can prove it,' said Arthur warmly.

'And what was the sum which the gentleman who is to marry Miss Seaford proposed to have?'

'You yourself, sir, some time ago, said you would give two thousand pounds.'

'Two thousand devils! Do you think I have nothing else to do with 2000*l.* than to hand it over to some swindling friend of yours, who will bolt to Australia, and drink himself to death with it?'

Arthur looked rather crestfallen. His uncle, indeed, made suspicion a matter of personal vanity. He was proud of saying that no one could take him in; and he would rather have thrust a bank-note in the fire than give a halfpenny to a beggar who might perhaps be an impostor. Richard Drem was clearly not in a conciliatory mood; and, on the other hand, could he expect Hickes to marry on the vague

chance of wakening some gratitude in the breast of this cantankerous old man? But Richard Drem was growing impatient of his presence; and at last Arthur blurted out,

‘You don’t believe me, sir. But will you give this man 2000*l.* when the marriage has taken place?’

‘Yes, yes; I will,’ said Richard Drem, pretending to be merely anxious for the whole subject to be removed, but in reality more struck than he chose to show by this dim hope of having his son back again in his own home.

‘Thank you, sir,’ said Arthur. ‘You will see that there was more in the proposal than you appear to imagine. I should not have ventured to speak about it, but that my anxiety about my cousin—’

‘Very well, very well; go away now, and don’t tell any more lies,’ said Richard Drem hurriedly. ‘And you may tell Mr. Ewart to bring me up those “salted” invoices of which he complains. I must teach these people with whom they are dealing.’

For that the great Richard Drem, who

could at once establish lines of commerce stretching over a hemisphere and detect the sham old soldier who asked him for a penny at the corner of the street, was to be imposed on by a trumpery China firm, that were glutting the market in order to get fancy sums on the consignments, was not to be thought of for a moment. What would Napoleon have said to one of his puppet-kings, had the latter attempted, in his own little sphere, to mimic the great emperor, and turn his master's weapons against the master himself?

Arthur Drem put on his hat and walked up to the coffee-house, in which Hickes was amusing himself with some brandy-and-water and a newspaper. When it was explained to him that Mr. Drem would give him the money only after the marriage, he looked rather blank.

‘What guarantee have I?’ he asked. ‘Suppose he were to change his mind, what should I do?’

‘You can’t expect him to give you the money beforehand,’ said Arthur; ‘for he

knows nothing about you; and you don't want any guarantee from a man like him. Do you think he has got the habits and tricks of the manager of the Rotunda? I tell you, his word is as good as if you had the 2000*l.* in your hands. You must remember with whom you are dealing; and Arthur rather drew himself up, to let Hickes know that a merchant was a gentleman, and to be trusted.

‘What did he say to you?’ asked Hickes.

‘You mean as to my share in the results? That, I can tell you, is likely to be merely a deal of abuse for meddling in a matter for the good of other people.’

‘Two thousand pounds is twenty hundred, isn't it? Twenty hundred!'

And here Hickes drew mental pictures of the various things he might do with this potent sum. There was very little consideration for Lilian Seaford likely to occur now. The money had come almost within his reach; he had but to put out his hand and pluck the golden grapes.

‘How soon after the marriage will he pay it?’

‘O, directly. Such a sum is a mere trifle to him, you know.’

‘And you think she will marry me?’

‘Of course; unless you frighten her by letting her see the real reason why you wanted to marry her; and then she would probably drown herself rather than become your wife. Everything lies clear before you. You can do all that we planned ever so long ago without harming or paining any one. It is now as it was then: the climax seemed an abrupt and impossible thing; but the steps towards it, as I told you they would, have been easy and gradual. And so with those to come.’

‘Ah, yes,’ said Hickes; ‘I’m not out of it yet. I can scarcely believe—’

‘You never could believe anything, unless it was at the point of your nose. But I mean to have something to eat. Shall we have luncheon here?’

‘No. I have been watching the struggles of the man over there with his food

until I am nearly sick. A steak that looked like the back of a mahogany chair that had been blistered at the fire; vegetables that looked as if you'd worn them in your button-hole for a week; beer that should have been in a doctor's bottle, with a glass-stopper and a label.'

So they went elsewhere to have some brief lunch; and the time that Arthur could spare from the office he devoted to counselling Hickes as to how he should conduct himself towards the Lawsons and his future bride.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BRIDEGROOM.

VERY strange indeed was the first interview which the accepted lover had with his betrothed wife and her friends. Jims sat fierce and still, compelling himself to be calm, and yet looking as if he might at any moment rise and throw the intruder out of the window. Mrs. Lawson, no less angry (for both husband and wife, though looking on a solemn oath as irrevocably binding, were none the more disposed to forgive the means by which it had been obtained), bustled about the room in her excitement, making bitter speeches, and stopping every moment by the side of Hickes's chair, as if she meant to box his ears. Lilian herself sat mute and pale in a corner, anxious that there should be no

outbreak of wrath, and rather inclined to pity the timorous young man, who so vainly endeavoured to deprecate their hostility.

At the very moment of his entrance he had offered to them a carefully-studied apology for what he had done, with such extreme nervousness of manner and hesitation of speech, that they never dreamed of doubting his sincerity. And then, to each of them separately, as occasion served, he made an appeal for forgiveness. He had been maddened to do it; he regretted it now; but, since it could not be helped, he would atone for it in the future: he would convince them afterwards that Lilian's happiness had not suffered by this violent shock.

‘Jims,’ said Mrs. Lawson that same evening, when they were alone, ‘if that young man is to marry our Lilian, it would be wise o’ us to put the best face on the matter, and no anger him. We are powerless in his hands; and he might be angered into dealing harshly wi’ her afterwards.’

‘There’s some sense in that — there’s some sense in that,’ said Jims. ‘And he seems a well-disposed lad, gentle in his manners, and anxious to please folk. I’m thinking we ought to make Lilian believe the best o’ him, so that she may bear what is to come wi’ greater composure. There can be nae doubt o’ his being very fond o’ her—’

‘Or he would never hae done such a mad thing,’ said Mrs. Lawson.

‘And yet,’ said Jims, ‘I fear he is unstable; and as for his ignorance, it is quite extraordinar’. On nae single subject does he seem to hae the least information. Can ye believe that a man come to his time o’ life doesna ken the qualifications o’ a voter in his ain country, and actually had never inquired whether he had a vote or no?’

‘Folk are no a’ wud about votin’ and votes,’ said Mrs. Lawson with a touch of contempt. She suffered so much from Jims’s political harangues, that she almost looked on this ignorant young man as a sort of ally.

‘And his asking whether the Lord Chancellor was going to tak’ something off sugar in his next budget!’

‘I’m sure I wish he would,’ said Mrs. Lawson, who would have accepted the reduction gladly, whoever made it.

Accordingly Hickes found himself received in a much more courteous fashion on his next visit. Indeed, the two old people were quite kind to him. They had not only come to the conclusion that it would be politic of them to be civil to him, for Lilian’s sake, but that this marriage, though brought about by unjustifiable means, might in the end be better for everybody concerned, and would at least absolve them from that participation in Philip’s recent misfortunes which had been always a certain secret trouble to them. As for Lilian, she still seemed to regard him with fear, and was very silent while he remained in the house. He was content to accept this neutral attitude, in default of any more gracious welcome. He never tried to force her to speak more

directly to him. He was to her quite as respectful and distant in his manner, until his unassuming ways, and his anxiety to learn anything he was told, most favourably impressed the Lawsons, and they were almost disposed to forgive him for what he had done. His visits increased in number. He made them all little presents, the prettiest of which he offered to Lilian; and how could she refuse them? Sometimes she looked at these trifles with absent and wistful eyes; and Hickes, watching her, fancied she was asking herself what these might have been to her had they been the gift of another.

In those days, the young man became aware that he was beginning to regard her with a tenderness which was almost painful. For the more he thought of her, the farther away from him did she seem. Sometimes the calm resignation of her face was like to drive him to despair; and when she tried to be kind to him--when she smiled as she shook hands with him--there was a look in her face and in her eyes which

troubled him more than he cared to confess.

‘I am getting to love this woman, whose love is so far away from me,’ he said to himself one night as he walked home; ‘and if that should happen, what will happen to me?’

One evening he brought her some photographs.

‘You often speak of Devonshire,’ said he; ‘but you don’t seem to have any photographs of the places you know.’

‘I had some once,’ she said. She did not tell him that these were now part of the sacred possessions which had been associated with her bygone love, and were hidden away in a secret place, never more to be shown to mortal eyes.

‘I thought I might bring you these,’ he said; and he gave them to her.

She was sitting in the twilight, with her back to the window, and he could not well see her face. She took the photographs and began to look over them: at one of them she stopped. Why was she so silent?

he asked himself. Why did she hold the picture before her, down on her knee, as though she scarcely saw it? She did not turn over the others; she merely sat in the shadow, and regarded this tame little copy of one of the Devonshire coast-scenes, a glimpse of Tor Bay and Berry Head being included in it. And then she rose, and gently put the photographs on the table, and went out of the room. As she passed him silently, with her head rather bowed down, he fancied her face was wet with tears.

A fierce pang shot through his heart. He went to the table, lifted the photographic album, and turning over one or two leaves, arrived at a portrait of Philip Drem, which was placed opposite one of Lilian. The former he took out of the book, tore it savagely into several pieces, and flung the fragments into the fire.

‘She will never forget him?’ he said, between his clenched teeth.

‘Why, where is Lilian?’ said Mrs. Lawson, coming into the room.

‘Gone to see if Philip Drem isn’t coming up the road, I suppose,’ said Hickes angrily.

‘Deed, ye should be the last to say anything about that,’ said Mrs. Lawson indignantly. ‘Three times has he been here, trying to get speech o’ her; and she has considered it her duty no to see him. Mr. Drem is a gentleman,’ continued the old woman, nettled into something like scorn, ‘and wouldna force himsel’ where he is no welcome; and so he didna see her, but he has written to her again and again, begging her to see him for a few minutes.’

‘I won’t have him write to her! He has no business to write to her!’ said Hickes. ‘I don’t wish to interfere, but I will not have him write to her!’

‘Ma certes!’ exclaimed Mrs. Lawson vehemently. ‘Ye force me to say, Mr. Hickes, that ye seem to forget what ye hae done to both Philip and her. Interfere! If ye wish to have a whole bone in your body, dinna you interfere with Mr. Philip! That he has never sought a meet-

ing with you on his own account quite astonishes me; and may be it's because he is waiting to hear from her. But if ye are so far misguided as to provoke him to settle accounts wi' ye, tak' my word for't, my man, ye'll no ask for twa lickings o' *that* spurtle!"

"I'm very sorry, Mrs. Lawson," said Hickes; "I didn't intend to speak like that. And to tell you the truth, I scarcely know what I say when I find things going against me like this. I don't believe she cares for me one bit."

"Indeed," said Mrs. Lawson, whose moods did not veer round so rapidly, "I canna wonder at it. I am quite astonished to see her so kind to you as she is."

"Mrs. Lawson," cried Hickes suddenly, "I sometimes think I am a devil, instead of a man. I am not worthy of her. I will go away; I will release her from her promise."

"Can ye tell me," asked Mrs. Lawson calmly, "how ye propose to get her to break a solemn oath harmlessly?"

"Ah, don't you see," cried Hickes with

great eagerness, ‘don’t you see that I couldn’t do it? I couldn’t do it if I wished. I have not the power to do it, Mrs. Lawson, have I? And I am not so much to blame, after all; for I *would* release her from her oath, if I could. It was not to me she swore. *I* can’t release her; *I* can’t help it.’

Mrs. Lawson turned away with a gesture of impatience. She was unable to conceal her contempt for this petty, weak, vacillating nature, that was so anxious to throw the blame of its own actions on outward circumstances.

Shortly afterwards Hickes left the house, a prey to much restless anxiety and trouble; there were new emotions in his breast which terrified him. He knew not where all this might end. Hitherto he had been proof against whatever might happen, simply because he was equally indifferent to all the various issues which he considered possible. He had not contemplated this one, however; and now his indifference was wholly gone. He had played with events in a careless fashion, fancying that he could

at any moment withdraw; and now they were catching him up, as the wind does a withered leaf, and whirling him onward, whither he knew not.

‘What am I to do? What am I to do?’ he exclaimed, as he and Arthur Drem sat in consultation that evening. ‘I tell you I am becoming mad about this woman. I cannot bear to see her leave the room, unless I know she is coming back presently; and when I heard of Philip Drem writing to her, I felt I could have murdered him, or drowned myself, or done something desperate. I will not degrade her; I will not have her sold for this money. I will go away rather, and leave her—’

‘To my cousin Philip,’ said Arthur quietly. ‘That will be the result of your romantic nonsense.’

‘D—n him!’ said Hickes savagely. ‘I would murder them both rather than that!’

‘My dear fellow,’ said Arthur, ‘let us say you are in love with this woman. The chance of marrying her is at your disposal. Instead of that, you prefer to hand her

over to somebody else. Very good; you are generous, I must confess.'

'If I had only known, I should never have made her swear that oath—I'd have made her acquaintance, and have asked her fairly and honourably to marry me.'

'And she would have laughed at your impudence,' said his adviser coolly.

'Was there ever anybody in such a position as I am in?' said Hickes, in despair.

'Yes; you are badly off,' said Arthur Drem with a sneer. 'You are going to marry the woman you are in love with, and you are going to get a couple of thousand pounds for doing it. Certainly, you are badly off! Perhaps you would like somebody to give you five or six thousand a year, to complete the list of your miseries?'

'It's all very well for you to laugh; but I'm not ashamed to say that I've a good deal more tenderness of feeling than you have; and the more I think of this girl, the more I am determined—'

‘ You never had a particle of determination in your life.’

‘ You may find out very soon that I have. And if I must marry this girl to get the money and keep myself from starving, I tell you, I will not force her to live with me and keep herself wretched. Rather than that, I will get some means of sending her home to the Lawsons’ house, and spend years in gaining her free and full consent to live with me. I won’t have her remain in my house on compulsion, and have myself tortured day after day by her meekness and her suffering. What is coming of all this, I don’t know. Sometimes I get afraid ; I feel myself helplessly drifting into such a position as I dare not consider ; and I am tempted to go off direct to America, and never set foot in England again. But I cannot leave her—I could not leave her ; and so, I suppose, we must wait to see what may happen. One thing I am resolved upon, Drem. You may laugh as you like ; but until she comes of her own free will to my house, I will not ask her.’

‘Why ask her? She will go with you, of course, after the marriage is over.’

‘And I will get some means of sending her straight back to the Lawsons.’

‘So as to have the pleasure of courting her a second time? Do you know, my dear Hickes, that you have grown quite a romantic person of late? When we first talked of this matter—when you scouted the possibility of its all happening—did you ever contemplate uttering such an absurd speech as that? You are in love with a woman—you marry her—’

‘I am in love with a woman!’ said Hickes vehemently. ‘Heaven help me, that is true enough! And I tell you I will not be more of a brute and a coward than I can help; and if I marry her to get this money, I will leave her her freedom until I can persuade her that I am in love with her—until I can persuade her to have some liking for me. This I will do; and I declare to you, Drem, that sometimes, when I look at her, and see the way in which she tries to be kind to me, and tries not to

let me see that she is forcing herself to it—I declare that I feel I could go out and put a bullet through my head, and relieve her from her misery for ever.'

'She has turned your brain,' said Arthur with some pity.

CHAPTER XIII.

‘ MEIN LIEBCHEN WAR DIE BRAUT !’

OVER the north of London there lies, on this November morning, a thick white mist, and the sun that is visible through it is a distant globe of faint rose-pink. Now and again the folds of the white smoke waver hither and thither, and the luminous circle becomes pale and silvery, while occasionally the fog deepens into a turgid yellow, and the sun is of a dusky copper colour. As yet there are few people abroad; the shutters of the shops are just being taken down, and the first omnibus has not yet started for the City. Alec Lawson gets stealthily out of the house—unknown to any of its occupants—and makes his way down to Paddington and to Philip’s rooms.

The secretary of the Analytical Society

is at breakfast—the table being plentifully littered about with newspapers and opened letters. He is surprised to see Alec at this early hour—indeed, a trifle dismayed. And the lad bears ill-tidings in his face; for he has of late carried news to Philip of all that was going on at Hampstead, and comes now to report the climax.

‘O Mr. Philip, she is to be married this morning!’ he blurts out.

‘This morning?’ says Philip, turning suddenly pale.

‘I did not know till last night. None of them expected it; but it seems Mr. Hickes has had it all arranged and came up yesterday, and now the marriage is to be this forenoon.’

‘What does she say?’ asked Philip quite calmly.

‘Nothing at all,’ said Alec. ‘She is no longer sad and vexed, as she used to be. Instead of that, she seems to be very reserved and determined. I wonder what she means to do.’

‘She does not complain?’

‘No; she does not even like to hear my grandmother say anything against Mr. Hickes. She says that is of no use now. I think she tries to appear more cheerful and contented than she really is before me; for she knows I see you often, and I fancy she would not wish you to know that she was unhappy.’

‘You are going into the City now?’

‘Yes.’

‘Thank you very much for coming to tell me. I may go up to see the marriage.’

With that Alec left, wondering not a little that Mr. Philip should be so grave and so composed.

Somewhat later on, Philip went by rail to Finchley Road, and walked over to Hamps-
stead, and to the church where he under-
stood the ceremony was to take place. There
were several idlers—chiefly women—hang-
ing about, apparently waiting to have a
glimpse of the bride.

‘There is to be a marriage here this
morning, is there not?’ he asked of one of
them.

‘Two, sir,’ she replied.

By and by the clerk appeared, and Philip, having spoken a few words with him, begged permission to be allowed to go into the church. This was granted; and he entered the silent damp-smelling building, with its rows of gloomy pews, and dim windows, and melancholy altar-railings. He went into one of the pews and sat down in a corner, where he could not be seen by any one passing up the centre of the church.

So this was the end of all his dreams! There was a prayer-book lying before him; mechanically he opened it, and found himself reading carelessly these words, which had been written on the fly-leaf by some penitent sinner:

‘Peccavi peccatum grande, et mihi conscius multorum delictorum; nec sic despero, quoniam ubi flagitia abundaverunt, gratia superabundavit. Qui de peccatorum suorum veniâ desperat negat Deum propitium esse. Deo magnam injuriam facit, qui de ejus misericordiâ diffidit.’

“‘He does an injury to God who doubts

His compassion," he repeated. 'What compassion have I to be thankful for ?'

How slowly the minutes passed ! And now, upon one side of the church, a frail glimmer of ruddy sunshine fell, sending a few dusky shafts of light through the panes. It was cold, too, in this damp pew ; and there was a frosty odour in the air. This was not the picture of Lilian's marriage that he and she had drawn, in the olden times, when they had looked forward to walking down the dim aisle together—out into the warm air and the sunshine, with the song of birds around, and the blowing of the summer wind. How long ago it now seemed since they had talked together ! His memory wandered backward until it came to a beautiful period, at once beautiful and sad. He was still looking at the Latin inscription ; but in place of it he saw the blue waters of Tor Bay, and the white sunlight on the sails of a small yacht, lying at anchor outside the harbour, and Lilian with an open book on her knee, and a sunshade over her head. Had that time

ever been? He might go down now and see the white shingle, and the rocky cliffs, and the far horizon-line; and he would not be able to believe that he and she had ever been there. And yet there were odd phrases of hers belonging to this period which still seemed to sound in his ears; and he could see before him the piteous figure of the girl, as she bade farewell to the bay, and sat down and covered her face with her hands. Then the sail round the coast—the warm day on the Dart—and the tender evening they spent together down by the river, under the sunset, thinking of the great future that lay before them. Was all that a dream? or was this a dream—these ghastly pews, and the voices of one or two people without who waited to see the arrival of a pale bride?

There is a sound of carriage-wheels outside the church-door. Presently three men enter and pass along the aisle; one of them, who has a large flower in his coat, he recognises as Hickes. He trembles as he sees this man; for during these recent

days he has had strange thoughts about him ; and now that he is actually there, would it not settle this agony and misery once and for ever, if he were to spring upon him and choke the life out of the coward body ? The small prayer-book gets twisted and torn ; but Philip does not stir.

And then—in all the pale beauty of her innocence, and with a calm heroic light on her face—Lilian Seaford walked up between those dismal pews, Mrs. Lawson and Jims accompanying her. How lovely she was then, as the red sunlight tinged the white figure in passing, and fell warmly on the soft yielding golden-brown hair that he knew so well ! Yet she seemed to have changed greatly since he last saw her. Whence had come that new light to her face—the calm courage that dwelt in her eyes—and the firmness that was visible about her mouth ? Never before had he seen anything like this. There was in her bearing a dignity and self-possession which gave to her beauty maturity and repose. The face was paler too ; and there were

traces in her eyes of a sadness which no semblance of courage could quite conceal. Yet he saw that she made no effort to appear cheerful. She was grave, calm, and firm; there was no tremor of the hand or hesitation in her manner. So she passed on, with this simple majesty of bearing; and he could not see how they began the service, for in thinking of this poor girl and of her probable fate, his eyes were blinded with tears.

He bent his head down over the book, and heard only the confused muttering of a voice at the farther end of the church. He felt as though his life were slowly ebbing away from him; and that he should never stir from his present position. Those words that were being uttered were the dirge over a bygone life; and he had no wish to arise and face a new one. After this terrible, slow, acute torture were once finished, might it not be possible to sink into sleep, perpetual and dark?

And all at once there came to him a recollection of the time she had kissed him

on the banks of the Dart, and looked up into his face with her pure and truthful eyes; and he started up as from a dream, and nearly uttered a cry of despair. For there was his love being separated from him for ever; she was kneeling, in her white dress, with a ray of dusky sunlight falling on the beautiful head, and her hand was in the hand of another. She was leaving him now, and placing between them a barrier eternal, insurmountable.

‘O my darling, whom I loved so well!’ he groaned in his bitter unavailing grief.

He could not remain longer there. The place seemed to stifle him. He rose and went outside into the cold air and the wintry sunlight, that now gleamed down on the strange faces around the church-gates.

‘They are waiting to see the happy bride,’ he thought.

He would wait too. But he dared not meet her eyes; so he went some little distance off, and remained there. He heard the talk of the people standing about—some of

them seemed to know Lilian, through the Sunday-school, and were discussing the merits of the bridegroom in rather a contemptuous way.

‘She did not seem over-happy, did she?’ said one.

‘Them Sunday-schools are a rare place for courting, I hear,’ said a second.

‘She might ‘ave done better than him,’ said a third. ‘You wouldn’t find a prettier girl about here, I’ll take my oath.’

There was a slight bustle and murmur among the crowd when the bride came out. For one moment she seemed to glance round the faces, as if expecting to meet there with one she knew. The people observed with surprise that she was not on her husband’s arm as she came out; and that indeed he hurried forward in a somewhat awkward way from behind old James Lawson. There were two carriages there—the second being the one in which Lilian and the Lawsons had arrived. The first of course was reserved for the newly-wedded bride and bridegroom; and Hickes now

hastened up, to offer his arm and conduct her to the carriage.

‘No,’ she said in a low clear voice; ‘I go back with Mr. and Mrs. Lawson. You made me promise to marry you—I have kept my promise.’

How cold and calm she was as she turned away from him, with her face pale and her lips white and firm!

‘Lilian,’ he said.

Jims had come before him, and taken her hand. She stepped into the second carriage, Mrs. Lawson remaining valiantly to the last, as if she would dare any one to lay a finger on her girl.

‘Lilian,’ he said again, ‘you mistake altogether. If you had only come with me, I’d have shown you I wished to set you free. I did, indeed. I was going to send you home; I wanted to prove to you that I am not so bad as you think. Won’t you believe me—won’t you believe me, Lilian? I will let you go; I don’t wish to prevent your going; but you will believe what I tell you.’

She sat quite pitiless and cold in the carriage, apparently hearing nothing. The small crowd now began to suspect that something was wrong, and drew nearer to the wheels of the carriage.

‘Driver,’ said Jims in a loud and firm voice, ‘drive back to the house.’

‘Stay for one moment,’ cried Hickes in great excitement, for the crowd were surrounding him, and had begun to testify a lively curiosity. ‘I only wish to assure you, Lilian, that you need have feared no persecution from me. I had determined to win your full consent to be my wife.’

‘Drive on,’ said Jims.

The carriage began to move, and the crowd drew back. Philip, who had been left alone, saw only part of what had occurred. He was concerned chiefly in trying to get one last look at Lilian—perhaps the last for many, many years. As the carriage turned in the middle of the road, he caught a glimpse of the beautiful pale face that was inside; and in the same instant he knew that the girl’s eyes were fixed upon him

with a look of piteous pain which he never forgot.

‘God help her!’ he groaned. ‘My little girl seems to beg for forgiveness from me!’

He saw the carriage drive off; and he turned to go away, not caring whither. He was so occupied with his own bitter thoughts, that he scarcely knew that a hand was laid on his arm.

‘Look here,’ said a voice beside him; ‘it is you who have made her do this; it is you who have done it! You think I am afraid of you. I am not. I will let you know that you can’t always be master and lord of everything you see.’

The voice was husky and wild with excitement; and Philip, turning, saw himself confronted by Hickes. A powerful effort of self-control enabled him to resist the first impulse he felt to knock the man down. He merely shook off his hand, and said,

‘You had better go away.’

‘I will not go away!’ cried Hickes, who was apparently quite mad with jealousy, or

rage, or mortification, or all three combined. ‘I suppose you laid a pretty plan to make me the laughing-stock of my friends; and you think I am afraid of you, and you can do what you like.’

‘I tell you to go away,’ said Philip, again passing on, but with a darker light growing in his eyes.

‘I will not go away; I mean to settle with you *here—now—*’

‘Then, by heavens, if you will have it, take it!’

He turned rapidly round, and the next instant Hickes lay stretched on his back on the pavement. His two companions now rushed forward, and were for closing upon Philip; but the crowd came round them, crying, ‘Fair play!’

‘What do you want?’ said Philip, whose blood was now thoroughly up, to Hickes’s friends. ‘Do you want to provoke a street brawl? I think the best thing you can do is to pick up that fool who is lying there and bring him to his senses, and preserve a whole skin on your own bodies.’

There was something in his manner even more persuasive than his advice; and Hickes's companions thought better of it, and did as they were bid. Philip walked away from the group and from the crowd, with no great compunction for what he had done. Indeed, it very speedily escaped his memory; his heart was full of other and sadder things.

It was as in a dream that he wandered on, until he had reached the parts of the river between Kew and Richmond, with which he and Lilian were once familiar. He had come hither without set purpose—scarcely knowing, indeed, the direction of his steps. The various successive things that he saw did not distract his attention; he was aware of their presence under this chill and wintry sunlight; but it seemed to him that, outside the immediate circle of these familiar objects, there was another and greater world that was full of pain and darkness. What he did all that day he was never able to remember. Towards nightfall he returned to town, and over-

head there hung the crowded silence of the stars.

He glanced up at them as he walked along; but he did not know that another face, pale and sad, was also looking up to them, and wondering if they knew of her grief—if they could tell her how her love fared, and bear to him one last despairing message from her, now that they were separated for ever. Was he angry with her? That did not matter now; and yet she hoped he had gentle thoughts of her.

‘O, my lost love!’ she said to herself, ‘I must not think of you any more, but you will think of me and of the old times and of the Dart. How sad you looked this morning! but there was love in your eyes and kindness for me. And did you think I was hard-hearted, because I sat there so silent and did not cry to you for help? Would you have come to me, my poor boy, whom I used to pet so? And you must forgive me for all I have done, for the sake of our old, foolish, wretched fondness; and when you marry you will tell me, and I

will send your new love some flowers for her hair, to show her that I am glad you are happy.'

So she talked to herself and cried bitterly, now that the cold, red, fearful day was over, and she sat in the dark room alone. The world had grown so cruel to her of late, and now she had reached the close. There was an end of the happiness of her life; and she wondered whether she could not fly for sympathy and safety to the sheltering bosom of her mother.

Alas! when she gazed, with eyes blinded with tears, at the great throbbing vault of stars, they only deepened her misery. Those melancholy stars! that have been sought by the weary and the wretched since ever the mournful Pleiades looked down on a breaking human heart. Are they sad to us because we know that they are the only link between us and the forgotten nations that have lived out their little life and passed away long before history had a voice--between us and all the races of men that have looked up to them, and wondered, and died?

We know only that since ever human sorrow forced men to puzzle over the mystery of life, the pale stars have been there: the young husband, turning from the bedside of his dead wife, has stretched up his hands to them, and piteously entreated for one glimpse of the fair young soul that has gone from his side, and wondered in which of the great worlds of light she is now walking with shining feet; the young mother, in the dead of night, has listened to hear her child call to her from out of the wonderful star-plain, and has grown sick of the cold silence; and the lover, from over his loved one's grave, has questioned the vague mystery of the heavens, and wept because he saw no sign. So sad they are!—for we know that all this sorrow has passed before the cold un pitying eyes; and we know that the same stars will shine down on our small world when every trace of human life shall have been brushed from off its surface—when an ocean may lie over the graves of Abelard and Héloïse, and all the manifold voices of bygone centuries be mute. Is it

possible, we ask ourselves, that this must be—that a future comes in which there is no sound and no light—that the human race will be as the dead man who lies beneath the Atlantic, and cannot hear any more the bells of town or village ringing even in dreams? This is the question we ask of the stars; and they will not answer.

END OF VOL. II.

